

# THE FABULOUS FORREST

MONTROSE · J · MOSES





Ralph Allen

(28)



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# THE FABULOUS FORREST

**By Montrose J. Moses**

REPRESENTATIVE BRITISH DRAMAS  
REPRESENTATIVE CONTINENTAL DRAMAS  
REPRESENTATIVE AMERICAN DRAMAS  
REPRESENTATIVE CONTINENTAL ONE-ACT PLAYS  
HENRIK IBSEN: THE MAN AND HIS PLAYS  
A TREASURY OF PLAYS FOR CHILDREN  
ANOTHER TREASURY OF PLAYS FOR CHILDREN  
THE AMERICAN DRAMATIST  
BRITISH PLAYS FROM THE RESTORATION TO 1820  
THE FABULOUS FORREST

**By M. J. Moses and V. Gerson**

CLYDE FITCH AND HIS LETTERS





*From the Albert Davis Collection*

**EDWIN FORREST: VETERAN**

(1806-1872)

*"Foremost among a host of tyros."*

— JOE COWELL

# THE FABULOUS FORREST

The Record of an American Actor

BY

MONTROSE J. MOSES



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON  
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1929

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TO  
SEWELL HAGGARD

*In memory of hours of rare talk when his vision  
saw deeply and saw far; in memory of his unswerv-  
ing loyalty as a friend and his wise advice; in  
memory of his gentleness and courtesy.*



## PREFACE

FOUR biographies of Edwin Forrest have already been written. Alger, Rees, and Gabriel Harrison were intimate friends of the actor, and of the three, Alger was paid a sum of two thousand dollars annually for three years to write his book. Forrest was anxious for a published record of his career; he rejected any suggestion that he might set down in reminiscence an autobiography of himself; he had no such qualms as beset Joseph Jefferson, who turned to writing in the hope that his book might have vitality when he, as a player, was long forgotten.

Yet Forrest was anxious to be vindicated in print, though he assumed the attitude of wanting only the truth told about himself. In 1870, he was in close communion with Alger. "Having revealed myself and my history to you without disguise or affectation," he wrote, "I say, tell the blunt truth in every particular you touch, no matter where it hits and what effect it may have." There was a lurking hope in his breast that, though his temper might have been overbearing, "though I might have too much cause to sigh over my many weaknesses and follies, no single act of mine, I am sure, should ever make me blush with shame. I have always admired the

spirit of Cromwell, who said sternly, when an artist in taking his portrait would have omitted the disfiguring wart on his face, ‘Paint me as I am !’”

Notwithstanding, Forrest would have been the last to want such analytical frankness ; he would have been surprised that any portrait of him could fairly blame him, put upon his muscular shoulders any responsibility in the crucial climaxes of his life. He wanted a biographer who would salve his conscience, torn and twisted by the loss of friends, by the decisions of courts, by the presence of consuming jealousy, by personal disappointments, and by the dying off of a school of acting of which he was the only exponent. By 1870, he was firmly convinced that he was a wronged man, a deserted monarch of tragedy — whose subjects were faithless, since they would not hold that the king can do no wrong. He deplored the base ingratitude of a beholding world.

His appeals to Alger, however, show him conscious of shortcomings. “I claim no exemptions from the infirmities of my temper or my disposition,” he wrote appealingly ; “they are doubtless many, but I would not change the honest vices of my blood for the hypocrisies and assumed virtues of my malignant detractors.”

In much the spirit of *Coriolanus* addressing his mother, in much the tone of *Jack Cade* speaking to *Mariamne* —

“I cannot be  
The meek and gentle thing that thou wouldest have me.  
The wren is happy on its humble spray,  
But the fierce eagle revels in the storm,” —

in strains reminiscent of *Virginius'* virtue as a father, Forrest wrote to Alger of his struggles with poverty, of his championship of Hate — “hatred of oppression in whatever shape it may appear — a hatred of hypocrisy, falsehood and injustice —” and begged him to paint the portrait to the full.

Under such circumstances, the Alger biography — a ponderous, two-volumed record — was penned. The Reverend William Rounseville Alger did not lag in the task ; his book is full of heavy sermons on the dramatic art. Yet notwithstanding its irrelevance, there is first-hand material embedded in the pages which must be drawn upon for any further estimate — letters, opinions, anecdotes which have the virtue of authenticity.

Another friend came to the championship of Forrest in a biography. James Rees, who, as dramatic critic and theatre chronicler, wrote under the pen name of “Colley Cibber”, had from time to time printed in the papers long accounts of the actor’s turbulent career ; he had written extensive critiques on the different rôles in which he had attained fame. His biography is, therefore, a mixture of ill-sorted scraps of learning and information. Rees lived in close intimacy with Forrest ; he gave him the loyalty Forrest most coveted, and, in return, he shared with the actor in his final days the austere quiet of his library, the curious conglomerateness of his picture gallery. Together they studied those Shakespearean texts which the disabled yet indomitable actor used for his final readings.

The other two biographies are of a less pretentious nature. Gabriel Harrison, an actor and a close student of Forrest's method, though here and there he presents flashes of personal relationship, reserved most of his book for a critical survey of Forrest's interpretations; in this respect, he merely repeated the method employed by the voluminous Alger. Neither of them was an observer of shades of reading, of accretions of individual understanding, in the way H. C. Fleeming Jenkin reported the *Lady Macbeth* and the *Queen Katharine* of Mrs. Siddons. Nor does it appear that Forrest ever conveyed to them any conception of his own artistic methods.

Of the three biographies thus far mentioned, a study of the critical attitudes of both Rees and Alger will afford an excellent insight into the mental, moral, and social approaches of Forrest himself. They won his friendship not alone because of their loyalty, but because of their own mental acquiescence to his own manner and reasoning. The loyalty, as a biographer, of Lawrence Barrett, was of another kind. He wrote a volume for a series of lives dealing with actors of American note — the Booths, the Jeffersons, Charlotte Cushman — concise reviews of careers fresh in the mind of the public. To the main facts of Alger, he added a circumscribed number of small details, and suggested correspondence which either was burned in the fire which consumed so much of the library of Forrest, or else was scattered by the unfortunate tendency of small collectors to conceal

or to lose data so necessary to the vivid elucidation of our stage history.

That another biography of Edwin Forrest is here attempted would therefore need some justification. His life embraced vital years in the growth of this Republic, wherein the rise of the common man gave a vitality to our increasing material progress, even if it did not add much strength to our cultural claims. Forrest was one of those common men, who rose to distinction in his art; he was a pioneer, as all the actors of his day were, in the way he cut through primitive conditions, and brought the art of the theatre to isolated communities all over the country. The only background he had was the school of actors he was tutored in, and so apt a pupil was he, so indomitable his will to be of count, that he fell readily into their way at first, and into their place when they retired. Forrest was representative of the America of his day; there were reasons for his style, and, just as definite as these, there were causes for his complete disappearance in influence. When he turned actor, he wore the cloak of noteworthy predecessors; he appeared in pieces which represented a theatre taste of the Old Stock. When he became patron of the American drama, those who wrote new plays for him caught from him his likes and detestations; they selected the heroes of freedom, they extolled the paternal and maternal virtues he adored, they pictured in eloquence the causes of class oppression, and laid low aristocratic arrogance. In friendships, in politics, Forrest was a typical product

of his day. And finally, when he died, and his time-honored cloak was taken up by John McCullough, there was a new school in the person of Edwin Booth. That one of the close associates of Booth should have written a biography of the man who deplored the new “passionate school of tragedy” in the place of “rant” and “slow solemnity”, indicates that the new generation had at least the capacity for knowing what was of worth in that which they had forsaken, and what would be of value for all time to come in their tradition.

The life of Edwin Forrest has not heretofore been viewed in relation to the backdrop of its national surroundings ; he was in the limelight of local politics, and became the centre of an international quarrel which ended in riot ; he made official friends with those who represented the cultural outlook of America, and yet he was not an intimate friend of any, save a few outside the magic circle. He was the idol of the stage, yet among the select he was regarded with a certain amount of snobbish suspicion. They might wine him, publicly dine him, send him forth with medals as their son of Art, their first real Tragedian born on home soil — but they were careful about receiving him in their inner sanctums. Commenting upon the public dinner given Forrest by the citizens of Philadelphia on his first professional return from England, Wemyss deplores that the doors of private dwellings were still closed to him because he was an actor. Yet Forrest could claim Bryant and Parke Godwin, Halleck and Irving, Simms and

## P R E F A C E

Cooper, M. M. Noah and William Leggett among his ardent supporters, until foolhardy, torturous jealousy led him into indiscretions and bad manners, which swept many of them from him, and left him crushed.

It is well to regard Forrest as representing in his outlook much of that which Charles Dickens abhorred in the American people. He was not alone, however, in that inordinate pride of country which tripped him into thoughtless boasting and sensitive irritation. Nor was he without cause for resentment over being more or less regarded as a diamond in the rough, when he first appeared before the London public.

These external irritants determined many of Forrest's gross attitudes. His friends have sought to find excuses for him in the circumstances of time and place. In reality he was a product of his age, not typical of its refinements but of its untutored strength and excessiveness. For that reason, I have dwelt upon those stirrings of political and social change, which would either have quickly appealed to or as readily been repulsed by Forrest. Just as surely as in his young manhood Forrest adopted the brass-buttoned coats, gay waistcoats, pantaloons, and ruffled shirts of the period, so his mind was similarly clad in all the small ideas of the time. In him concentrated the bitterness of one nation against another. Diplomacy at Washington weathered many war clouds; but theatre jealousy brought open warfare in the streets of New York because of the petty

bickerings of William Macready and Forrest. In him were to be found the middle-class ideas of marriage, which recognized a double standard of morality, and which clipped the freedom of living for the reason that conjugal devotion meant abject, slavish attendance on the man's will. Hence Forrest's marriage began on the assumption that it had in it all the elements of misery which his suspicious nature helped quickly to develop.

The Forrest sources have been scattered; much that is of value has been burned; a great deal has been lost. One has to rely heavily on Alger and Rees; however formless their biographies, much valuable material is there to be rearranged, and lifted from extraneous matter and untenable excuses. I gladly acknowledge my dependence on this material. Here and there stray references are found: letters and documents that cannot now be located. William Leggett corresponded with both Forrest and his wife, but Mr. Allan Nevins, who is the historian of the *Evening Post*, informs me that in all papers examined by him he does not recall meeting with any such letters. It is only when one is involved in minute particulars that the curious gaps still existent in American literary and theatrical history become evident. A definitive edition of the letters of William Cullen Bryant is needed, many of his personal papers and letters still being unpublished. The same is true of much of the Longfellow, Parke Godwin, and N. P. Willis material. These men, contemporary with Forrest, impinged upon his career.

I was fortunate in locating Forrest's diary, kept during his first trip abroad, covering the period from August 5 to September 27, 1835. While it reveals the conventional tourist's impressions, there is in the slim manuscript a certain irresistible enthusiasm and power of word painting that shows Forrest readily influenced by his surroundings. It indicated an uncommon exercise of will on his part to interrupt his unusual position on the stage in order to strengthen and broaden his outlook upon the world. Even though Forrest had no original type of mind, to his credit it must be said that his mental approach was always serious, dignified, earnest, even though a little heavy. But in the Diary there is indication that he at this time more nearly approached spontaneous enthusiasm than at any other period of his life.

It is very fortunate that we are able to reach some clear notion of Forrest's business astuteness in his dealings with the many dramatic authors who wrote for him. Through the courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania, I am able to present from the Bird manuscripts in their possession some of the business arrangements which transpired between Forrest and his most considerable author — the one who is supposed to have profited oftenest by the mythical munificence of the actor. If these figures and impressions place Forrest in a selfish light, it must be realized that, in those early days of the theatre, actors closely identified with certain rôles and particular characteristics of acting protected their special fields with zealousness. James H. Hackett re-

sented any encroachment upon his dialect delineations. Forrest sought to protect what he considered to be his outright property by not allowing his "prize" plays to be published. Copyright was a theory only. Most of these plays are now available in print, but there is, as yet, still missing, the whole of the manuscript of "Metamora", though the typical "feel" of the dialogue may be readily measured in the stray portions of the play preserved in the Forrest Home. Several times, false alarms have been sounded that the script had been found. And there is a possibility that suddenly, out of some old theatrical trunk, it will be taken. But at present it is among the "lost dramas" of the American theatre.

Stray papers and stray letters have been put at my disposal from various drama collections. It is a pleasurable task to record my appreciation of the aid so generously given me in all directions. The New York Public Library has offered me every facility for close contact with the sources available in its stacks and in the Locke Collection. I am beholden to Associate Director H. M. Lydenberg for his personal interest. The Columbia University Library, the New York Historical Society, the Boston Public Library, and the Society Library of Philadelphia, have also been most kind in their prompt response to my queries, while the resources of the Drama Collection at Harvard University, under the splendid guardianship of Mr. Robert Gould Shaw and Mrs. Lillian A. Hall, have at all times been made

easy of access. Mr. Roy Day, Librarian of The Players, has generously placed at my disposal whatever Forrest material has fallen into the possession of that time-honored club, and Mr. Channing Pollock has put into my hands, for consultation, a small black notebook with scant and pathetic entries made by the actor after his divorce from Catherine Sinclair. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Messmore Kendall for his graciousness in allowing me untrammelled range of his rich drama collection, which includes all the theatrical treasures gathered by the late Harry Houdini, whose friendly association is of vivid memory. I wish to thank Mr. Don Seitz for his courteous responses to my inquiries regarding Horace Greeley's theatre interest; Mr. Emory Holloway, who from the fullness of his Whitman knowledge made several valuable suggestions; Mr. Harry McNeil Bland and the Fridenberg Galleries, through whom I have been able to secure several rare prints for the book; and Mr. Albert Davis, who has not only responded to my call for definite illustrations, but has courteously loaned me from time to time rare clippings and newspaper files in his possession.

I have not visited the various homes in which Forrest lived, some of which are still standing, for the empty shell is more depressing than it is enlightening. The Forrest Home has been most willing to coöperate, but if I have not dwelt much upon that splendid institution, it is merely because it was established *after* the death of Forrest, built upon the spirit of a desire outlined in the latter's will. Too meticulous

a following of the trail often throws a veil of sentimentalism across a portrait which otherwise might be sharper and clearer. Nor will it be found that I have recorded too slavishly the dates of various engagements which filled the life of this busy actor. He was his own relentless taskmaster, always alert for the main chance. And his surprising popularity made necessary reengagement after reengagement during the same season. The people never tired of the selfsame repertory. For the final chapter of the book, I have reserved an estimate of his greatest rôles, in which contemporary record asserts he reigned supreme.

Despite my inability to locate certain data which once existed, the materials I have been able to gather show Forrest in solid proportions, an actor very definitely a product of his times. He was a man of powerful physical energy which overawed the exercise of his spirit. Much of that physical power, could it have been controlled by wise judgment, could it have escaped the whip-lash of suspicion and jealousy, might have been toned down to harmonize with moments of moving passion, of gentle emotion. If this had been the case, then Forrest would have taken his place among the rare geniuses of the stage, rather than among those eccentric players whose talents brushed the borders of genius, and merely showed the colors of close proximity.

MONTROSE J. MOSES

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# THE FABULOUS FORREST



## CHAPTER I

### ENTER EDWIN FORREST

Edwin Forrest came into the world with no spectacular background. His grandfather Forrest was known as a respectable citizen of Cooniston, Midlothian, Edinburgh County, Scotland, and his father William, an emigrant to America, first located in Trenton, New Jersey, we are told, as an importer of Scotch fabrics, later going to Philadelphia to accept a position with the United States Bank. He brought with him to America the taciturnity, the devoutness, the methodically earnest inheritance of his own country, and he also could have brought, if he had cared for such a thing, the family coat-of-arms, with the motto, *Vivunt dum Virent*. But he seems to have cared little for such emblems of respectability and the son to care less, for the crest was discovered accidentally by a friend. I am suspicious of the probability, in view of the fact that Edwin's future wife, Catherine Sinclair, had the planning of his castle fortress on the Hudson, that it was she likewise who had him use part of this crest on his "polite" letter paper.

Alger details the characteristics of this father, and we may take his comments as a reflection of

the son in reminiscence. He had a pale and sombre face, over which at rare times broke a smile, the like of which for beauty could not be found. He was poor, unenlightened, contentedly domestic, always an impecunious clerk with a large family which he left unprovided for, when, in 1819, at the age of sixty-two, he died of consumption.

His mother, whose maiden name was Rebecca Lauman, was of German descent and was born in Philadelphia. She was a good woman, of poor education but of strong character, and was earnestly respected and loved by her son. There must have been a quality about her to respect. Forrest's friends, like Sheridan Knowles and manager Wemyss, always strove to render her service, and William Leggett took pains to let her have news of her son while he was abroad.

These two plain people were married in 1795, and the outcome of the union was seven children, one of whom died nameless at birth in 1804. The others were christened, *en masse*, by the Reverend Doctor Joseph Pilmore, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Third Street, Philadelphia, on November 13, 1813.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of Edwin's birth the family were residing at Number 51 George Street, in Philadelphia, remaining there until his fourth year, when they moved to Number 55 Shippen Street. The year

<sup>1</sup> The children were as follows: Lorman (spelled elsewhere Lauman), 1796-1822; Henrietta, 1798-1863; William, 1800-1834; Caroline, 1802-1869; nameless child, 1804, died at birth; Edwin, 1806-1872; Eleanora, 1808-1871.

before his father's death, they moved to Number 77 Cedar Street, and there remained until 1827, when Edwin had made enough to care for his mother and sisters in such state as he thought befitted them.<sup>1</sup>

Of this large family, Forrest outlived all and was the only one to rise to heights of any distinction. The tragedy is that with his death, the name of Forrest was extinguished entirely. His own married life, while not fruitless, was first saddened by the death of his four children, and then by tragic unhappiness, which ended in divorce.

The history of the theatre shows that, largely, distinctive dramatic talent comes through inheritance; that early incentive is encouraged by the example of some one member of the family having gained distinction in the profession. The actor families that have threaded through the records of the American stage were well seasoned in the art, being, if not born in the greenroom, decidedly reared among the scenes, and coming on as babes and children in melodramas, spectacles, pantomimes, and romantic tragedies of the early eras. The theatrical lines of Booths, Jeffersons, Drews, Wallacks, contain many nodes of outstanding talent, individuals born to the royal purple of tragedy or to the scintillant rainbow of comedy.

<sup>1</sup> The curious-minded, who desire to locate the various houses connected with this family, may find satisfaction in knowing that in 1791 the name of William Forrest was recorded as having an address: The Dispensary, Number 68 Chestnut Street; in 1794, he had a store at Number 26 South Second Street, and in 1797, he resided at Number 10 North Front Street.

Remote ancestors are sometimes to blame for the Thespian blood, and it has cropped out where least expected. And then there may be no accounting for the theatre strain at all. Asher Davenport kept a tavern in Boston in the days when coaches lumbered on their way from "Way down East" to New York, and stopped there to change horses and find refreshment. His son was Edward Loomis Davenport. It was at his father's Exchange Coffee House that the boy met Edwin Forrest, who recognized talent in him, way and beyond whatever ability he may have shown for clerking in a dry-goods house or in a hotel. Thus through young Davenport a new theatre family was launched.

What the strain was that determined the career of Forrest has not been discovered. He spoke not at all of his ancestry, caring little for such distinctions. With him the great import was "I, Edwin Forrest." He gave lavishly of love and affection to his family, and showed unremitting concern for them to the very year before his own death, when the last of his immediate group passed away. He had cause to remember them all because they were in personality distinctive, however limited in their mental range. In correspondence he was always solicitous for their welfare, and was ever watchful of an opportunity to better their estate. He had great admiration for his brother Lorman, the tanner and currier, a six footer, who sought adventure and met his death in a filibustering expedition. Lorman was in possession of daring imagination, which would

appeal to the dramatic sense. Writes Forrest to William from Philadelphia, on August 1, 1822:

Lorman has returned from New York, and intends on Monday next to embark on board a patriot privateer, now lying in this port, for Saint Thomas, and from thence to South America, where, in the patriotic service, he has been commissioned 1st lieutenant, at a salary of eighty dollars per month. He screens himself from mother by telling her he is going to Saint Thomas to follow his trade, being loath to inform her of the true cause. A numerous acquaintance accompany him on the said expedition. He writes me to beg of you not to say anything when you return more than he has allowed himself to say. It is a glorious expedition, and had I not fair prospects in the theatre line, I should be inclined to go.

Thus would the Forrests serve anything to escape the monotony of trade. We find William doing likewise, for as a printer he chafed, and before he had reached his majority he had adopted the theatre profession. He was down South when Edwin wrote him of Lorman, and by his sixteen-year-old brother was being advised to come back to Philadelphia where there were prospects of a job at the Walnut Street Theatre, or, surer still, at his trade. William formed a partnership with William Duffy as theatre manager in Albany. Duffy had been a member of the Caldwell Company in New Orleans, when Edwin was there. William was probably a better manager than actor, though, in the latter capacity, he supported his brother in "Metamora", during April, 1829. While playing in a

dramatization of Scott's "The Fair Maid of Perth", in June, 1829, he was severely wounded by a dagger blow. We find William allied with Duffy and Jones in managing the Arch Street Theatre, in Philadelphia, during 1831, and it was while at this house, in 1834, that he was suddenly seized with bilious colic and died. Edwin, in New Orleans at the time, writes his mother :

We have experienced a deep and irreparable loss. You are deprived of a dutiful and affectionate son, my dear sisters of a most loving and devoted brother, and I have now none on earth to call by that tender and endearing name. The intelligence of William's death was a severe shock to me, so sudden, so unexpected. It seems but yesterday that I beheld him in the pride of his strength and manhood ; and I can scarcely credit that his "sensible warm motion has become a kneaded clod", doomed to lie in cold abstraction and to rot.

Filial devotion and tender care are uppermost in Edwin's mind ; he is solicitous for fear this tragedy will fall too heavily on his mother's shoulders. His love for her is strong and dominant. It is well to bear this in mind in all his own turbulent years to follow. The mother and sisters are now alone left to him, and because they only affected his life in a strictly personal and domestic way, we are justified in dealing with them now. There is ample correspondence with his mother, to show how eager he was to keep her in close touch with his progress and his growing prosperity. These references, since they involve his career, are detailed in their proper

places. When she passed away, on June 24, 1847, he was crushed. She had been the moral guide of his life, and now it was removed. It was almost immediately after this that his own married life went to smash, largely because there was no controlling influence to check his temper and his suspicious nature.

He never tired of dwelling on the love and comfort created in him even by the thought of his mother, and among his papers were found poems which the very mention of her name inspired — commonplace verses, echoing phrases he had read; halting verses that rhymed correctly, but whose words and sequences of thought were prosaic. He turned to verse to soothe his melancholy, and even in ordinary correspondence he easily fell into mournful numbers. He was not an original man, either as regards his personal sentiment or his professional work. He was dominant by reason of physical vigor. His emotions through the years became greater in volume, but not richer by reason of insight; his professional work became a yearly routine which he served devotedly. But nowhere have I been able to find any trace of comment which would indicate spiritual understanding. He was continually painting mental pictures, and bringing his interpretations in accord with them. So, in his personal emotions, he gave correct expression to them, he shaped them according to what he thought was proper usage. Even to himself he posed; his heart might bleed — as it had just cause to do — but he

could only cry out in phrases proper to the time. His culture was not inbred but acquired. His poetry was cheap and tawdry imitation. He attitudinized in soul as well as in body.

Upon his sisters, therefore, he was to lean for those domestic duties which, after the separation from his wife, had to be undertaken by them. One by one, they too, however, were removed, until the lonely man was bereft of all those ties which had meant so much to him. Henrietta died in 1863; it is she who had taken his mother's place. "Her wisdom was indeed a lamp to my feet, and her love a joy to my heart," wrote Edwin to his friend Oakes. He had lost his zest for life by this time. He who had once believed in immortality had become a doubter. He was in the midst of the winter of his discontent. Six years passed and Caroline died from apoplexy. Maybe, argues the stricken brother, there is an after life of meeting. Two years more, and Eleanora, paralyzed and with cancer, passed away. She was mild and gentle and kind, declared the papers.

Thus left alone in his own house, Edwin Forrest — hard yet gentle, disillusioned yet moved to outbursts of affectionate belief in the spiritual bonds of friendship, awaited his own end. "Is there no rest but in the grave?" he was heard to exclaim.

Edwin was brought up in the midst of grinding poverty. He saw Henrietta taken from school at a tender age, but with his two sisters, Caroline and Eleanora, he went to the public school. He was

in attendance from his fifth to his thirteenth year. This was the only education he had. During that time he developed a rare quality of voice and impressed every one with his powers of memory and mimicry. His devout parents determined him for the ministry, and this desire was doubtless strongly abetted by the Reverend Joseph Pilmore (1739-1825), a Yorkshire man, with formidable manners, expressive gesture of striking his breast, and long hair, powdered in the fashion of the time, falling to his shoulders. How often, of a Sunday, after church, would the young Forrest give memorable imitations of the divine!

There is another unforgettable figure that often graced the Forrest household. Was there much in common between Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), the famous ornithologist, and William Forrest, of the Girard Bank, other than that they both hailed from Scotland? Certainly, to the boy Edwin, the presence of this man lent romance to a deserving but unstimulating atmosphere. Wilson had published his "American Ornithology" in 1810, and the colored plates were rich attraction for a growing lad. Before him, Edwin recited the speech from Home's tragedy, "Douglas", and as Wilson listened to the hackneyed lines beginning,

"My name is Norval; on the Grampian hills  
My father feeds his flocks";

he recognized elements of latent talent in the boy. He taught him Burns — and ever to Forrest's mind came the face of this man as he read the "Dirge"

or "To Mary in Heaven." Lorman was proud of his brother's artistic ability; down in the tannery, Edwin was lifted on to a stone table and made to recite, much to the delight of the workmen.

After his father's death, Forrest's next memory is of his mother at the head of a millinery shop, assisted in her sewing by Caroline and Henrietta. Eleanora was kept at school, but it was needful that Edwin should earn his living. This was the saga of most American families under the industrial lash. So he was apprenticed to a Colonel Duane, who had a printing shop and who published a sheet called the *Aurora*. Then he went to a cooper shop on the wharf, and again to a ship chandlery on Race Street.

He had now — 1819 — reached the age of thirteen, with only one great ambition — to take part in amateur entertainments. He had, some years before, gone to the old South Street Theatre, hallowed because George Washington had often sat in the stage box. Charles Porter was the manager in the days when Forrest, then only eleven, had made his first public appearance on a stage. Porter had been in need of a girl, and Forrest was in the street playing, when from the stage door came Porter with the startling suggestion that one of the boys should help him out. Forrest volunteered and hurried home with the playbook. He began gathering his girl costume for the part of *Rosalia de Borgia*, in "Rudolph; or, The Robber of Calabria", a romantic melodrama typical of the period. A neigh-

bor, one Eliza Berryman, supplied him with a dress and a turban, while horsehair served as ringlets. How the pit roared at his improvised feminine disguise! It was not a very promising beginning. Porter was disgusted and turned deaf ear and profane heart against Forrest's entreaty that he be given another chance. The boy was undaunted, determined. He learned Goldsmith's famous Epilogue, written for Lee Lewis, and one night, clad as *Harlequin*, in tight pantaloons and close round jacket, both of which he had daubed with paint, he rushed upon the stage before the curtain descended on the evening's program and began to recite. The audience was electrified; those in the pit were highly amused when he did a flip-flap. They wanted this divertissement repeated. They called for it. The management saw it was a success. They engaged "Master Forrest" to do it again. Thus he pushed himself upon the stage. It was not for nothing that the Thespian Society, to which both he and William had belonged, had worked in histrionics. They were familiars at Jacob Zelin's tavern and in an old house in Harmony Court and Hudson's Alley, and they were soon joined by the Mortonians, organized as early as 1812. M. M. Noah was among the number, including a heterogeneous collection of journeymen, carpenters, and bookbinders. John Swift, future mayor of Philadelphia, knew Forrest in these early days.

It was at this time that, one evening, at the Tivoli Garden Theatre, on Market Street, young Forrest

was in an audience listening to a learned professor descant upon the properties of nitrous oxide, or laughing gas. He called upon those before him to come up and partake of the beneficent vapor. Forrest leaped to the occasion; he inhaled from the inviting bag and suddenly burst forth in elocutionary glory with the Shakespearean lines :

“What-ho ! young Richmond, ho ! 'tis Richmond calls.”

The story goes that despite the uncontrolled exhilaration of his voice, Forrest held his audience spellbound. John Swift, then a rising lawyer of note, heard him, and thereupon befriended him. In after years, when Swift was mayor, he was present at the Philadelphia dinner given in honor of Forrest, on his return from England in 1837, and Forrest recalled to him that “four lustres are now nearly completed since the event occurred to which I allude.” He told of the laughing-gas incident, and in characteristic overemphasis declared :

“The boy, awaking as from a dream, was surprised to find himself the centre of attraction, '*the observed of all observers.*' Abashed at his novel and awkward position, he shrunk timidly from the glances of the spectators, and would have stolen in haste away; but a stranger stepped from the crowd, and, taking him kindly by the hand, pronounced words which thrilled through him with a spell-like influence. ‘This lad,’ said he, ‘has the germ of tragic greatness in him.’ ”

So reminisced this young man of thirty-one,

## ENTER EDWIN FORREST

dramatizing the unbefriended boy he was then. But even at that early age, he was not quite the retiring, shrinking lad he pictured himself. Legendary tales are told of his seeking out the ringleader of the boys who had laughed at him in his bizarre dress for the part of *Rosalia*, and giving him a beating for his unsolicited criticism. He was starting early in his resentment of any ill favor. Alger would reduce Forrest's youthful pugnacity to moral fights for the cause of the wronged — whether human beings or animals. But it would appear that he had the ordinary quick-fire temper of the street gamin that sometimes has back of it a kind-hearted impulse.

He was still in his early teens and wildly ambitious to progress. Rees declares that he took elocution lessons from one Daniel Maginnis. But Lawrence Barrett states, with equally as authoritative a precision, that, through the help of a liquor merchant and a grocer, Forrest was able to come under the vocal care of Lemuel G. White, who had taught James E. Murdoch and David Ingersoll. It is enough to know that Forrest was preparing himself for the large compass of a star, and for no modest beginning. His friend Swift gave him introductions to Wood and Warren, of the Walnut Street Theatre, and his first professional début may be dated November 27, 1820, when, as *Norval* in "Douglas", played by "A young gentleman of this City", he was given his first real criticism by his former employer, Duane, who was afterwards Secretary of

the Treasury under Jackson. When one notes the type of men Forrest was thrown with from his earliest years, all the more apparent is it why his interest should have so strongly pointed to politics. In the cast with him on that evening, besides William Wood and William Warren (father of the beloved William Warren of the Boston Museum), was the grandmother of the famous *Rip Van Winkle*, Joseph Jefferson. This was the beginning of Forrest's splendid schooling in the severities of the old stock system; it would have been well, not only for his art, but for his disposition, had he risen slowly in such seasoned ranks as those in which he found himself. Recall the date, and realize he was but fourteen. In Duane's critique, we learn of an uncommon first performance, devoid of artifice, instinct with the true feeling for sentimental romance. Even at this tender age, Forrest impressed his hearers by his self-possession, his rich vocalization. In other words, Duane found him extraordinarily ripe, and giving rare evidence, indeed, of modest deportment.

The poetic muse sang young Forrest's praises; every one looked to this youthful prodigy as the successor to Cooper. Alger gives the verses of Joseph R. Chandler, editor of the *United States Gazette*, who reflects the significance of a new star on the dramatic horizon at the time. Let us quote the halting lines; they contain many of the seeds of disdain and national pride which invited Forrest's pugnacity, and brought down upon him years of crushing misery:

ENTER EDWIN FORREST

Turn we from State to view the mimic Stage,  
Which gives the form and pressure of the age.  
Each season brings its wonders, and each year  
Some unfledged buskins on our boards appear;  
And Covent Garden sends us stage-sick trash  
To gather laurels or to pocket cash.  
A Phillipps comes to sing us Braham's airs,  
And Wallack, Finn, and Maywood strut with theirs.  
These sickly meteors dim our hemisphere,  
While rare as comets Cookes and Keans appear:  
These fopling twinklers, with their borrowed glare,  
Will meet our censure when we cease to stare.  
But the bright sun that gives our stage its rays  
Still lights and warms us by its innate blaze.—  
We have a power to gild our drama's age,—  
COOPER'S our Sun, his orbit is our stage.  
Long may he shine, by sense and taste approved,  
By fancy reverenced, and by genius loved!  
And when retiring, mourned by every grace,  
May FORREST rise to fill his envied place!  
Dear child of genius! round thy youthful brow  
Taste, wit, and beauty bind the laurel now.  
No foreign praise thy native worth need claim;  
No aid extrinsic heralds forth thy name;  
No titled patron's power thy merit decked:—  
The blood of Douglas will itself protect!

Thus was Forrest's position heralded, and it is natural that he should seek out Cooper, who was living near Philadelphia, and get advice from him. The right sort of warning was sounded by the veteran player, who had himself gone through the arduous training known to all actors of the time, great and small. Evidently Forrest's head was turned by his success as *Norval*; he had no time, to say

nothing of his possessing no patience, to go slowly. He answered Cooper tartly, and the veteran saw that, in such mood, Forrest was after no advice other than that which would accord with his vaulting ambition. Forrest left him imperiously, Cooper bade him good-by kindly. They were to meet again, and play together, and Forrest was to accept his helping hand. He was always ready to accept anything, if, at the moment, it suited his purpose.

## CHAPTER II

### A CURTAIN LECTURE: THE MATTER OF BACKGROUND

There was no man more typical of his age than Edwin Forrest; his was a nature that needed not so much interpretation as diagnosis, for in him are to be traced all those restless stirrings which characterized the nation, where growth, expansion, opportunity, sensitiveness, confidence, indomitable industry, and faith in a new destiny resulted in a phenomenal development in the experiment of self-government.

There is a very charming scene in Maeterlinck's "The Blue Bird", where *Time*, in the realm of Unborn Souls, comes for his new quota to be born. One child is particularly anxious to become earthbound, and is brushed aside by *Time*, who says, "When the hour comes, it comes. . . . You will start at your proper hour, at your proper time." When Forrest first saw the light in Philadelphia, on March 9, 1806, the curtain rose upon scenes which were as much his inheritance as the Scotch father and German mother who were responsible for his being. We see Forrest later in his full-blooded Americanism, which was always blatant and generally in bad

taste; we see him in his growing detestation of the aristocrat, in his obsession against monarchical forms of government; we estimate his qualities as a player in the light of his elected masters in the art, and we are perforce obliged in his case to modify the belief that "there is a divinity that shapes our ends." Some things are to be explained by inheritance in Edwin Forrest; there are other things which are clearly the result of environment and self-will, or lack of will entirely. If there was a divinity that touched the character of this man, it lurked largely in the time spirit which was his back-drop, so to speak, and before which he strutted with physical exuberance. It is for such reason that we must at least note those multifarious, those conflicting points of contact through which he was caught up, shaped, even distorted into the man we call Edwin Forrest.

We cannot say that there was never such a man before or since in theatre history, for the more carefully we read about the career of Edmund Kean, the more startlingly alike are some of the events and responses to those events that transpired in the lives of the Englishman and his American satellite. We cannot say that Forrest was cast in a mold that distinctly individualized him as an original man by his own right, for such men as he and Daniel Webster were cast in a mold which we may call the Gentleman of the Old Stock — an oratorical bulk of passions and prejudices. His temperament was his own, but others may possess the same

sort of morbidity, jealousy, fierce obstinacy, and lack of control.

After all, biography should be largely concerned with separating the intricate interlacings of event and mood and thought reaction, and noting what main streams of life they feed, either for good or evil. There were pure, high moments in the career of Edwin Forrest, but these were almost spasmodic in comparison with the tumultuous, unhealthy urging of a large part of his existence, which consumed so much of his years and energy. His feet were firmly rooted in a traditional past, while his head was tossed in an agony of confusion. He did not grow into wisdom, but was always thrust into new battle lines on an old battlefield of very few and very limited motives and ideas. If he was political-minded, it was merely because he was born in an era when politics were every man's food and political affiliation every man's necessity. He confined himself, more than those players did from whom he inherited his manner and technique on the stage, to a limited number of rôles, and these did not vary very much, which indicates that his acting was neurological and muscular, rather than predominantly mental and spiritual; nor did he add to his original conceptions any new depths of understanding. He was acquisitive mentally, and surrounded himself with books of all sorts, mainly of the kind known in those days as a "gentleman's library"—for the mid-Victorian American possessed mental images of himself under certain con-

ditions. I recall a Southern planter who desired nothing better than to wander on his plantation acres with his dogs, proudly conscious that Sir Walter Scott used to do the same. To "commune" with literature, ranged in walnut cases; to quote long passages of Shakespeare at the dinner table; to write essays on the dramatic genius of David Garrick for literary clubs,—such pose and condition Forrest was born to and helped to perpetuate.

In 1806, Washington had been dead about seven years. Jefferson and Adams were not to pass away until Forrest was in his young manhood, 1826. As a boy he must have heard much of the value of the Constitution, and must have listened to the varying comments on Chief Justice Marshall's defense of the source of the nation's power. His daily life was regulated by the very slim salary his father received as runner for the National Bank, which grew out of Alexander Hamilton's nurturing, and was situated in Philadelphia. He must have heard many bitter comments on the fights that went on over this National Bank idea, which did not grow in sufficient strength to gain the confidence of the people, so that, in 1811, when its charter expired after twenty years, there was no renewal. With the result that father William Forrest was without a job, until Stephen Girard established his private bank and took him in, giving him a subordinate post.

It was a changing era, the one in which Edwin Forrest was born; there was a shift from the colonial

ways of doing things to the factory ways. The Yankee peddler was taking, along the same circuit used by the actors, products of American manufacture. The two were surely among those who hastened the extension of the frontier line. There was the store-boat and the theatre-boat, and it was as likely as not that the Conestoga wagon would hold a theatrical family as it would the raw beginnings of "big business." Forrest's contemporaries, James H. Hackett and "Yankee" Hill, must have studied at first hand the *Sam Slicks* that came out of New England with their commercial quickness. At first they were *Solomon Readies*, equipped to make brass buttons or to cut out new suits from home-spun cloth; then they brought the ready-made things, turned out from the factories and foundries, — brasses, clocks, and the like. Often they would sweep across fifteen hundred miles, just as the players would. In fact, were not the actors peddlers of dramatic art? So thought Clapp, and Wood, and Sol Smith, and Ludlow, and Wemyss, just as much so as the circuit rider, be he judge or doctor or minister; just as surely as were the wandering dentists and artists. The only means of interurban fertility was this.

Junius Brutus Booth (1796-1852) was ten years old when Forrest was born, Edmund Kean (1787-1833) nineteen, while Macready (1793-1873) was thirteen years his senior. Thomas Abthorpe Cooper (1776-1849) was distinctly of another generation, as was also William Augustus Conway,

Senior (1789-1828). Yet was Forrest to play with all four of them, and to be pitted against Cooper and Booth and Macready in competition. We have record of Forrest's impression of the stately and careful actor, Fennell (1766-1816), and J. P. Kemble (1757-1823) had not been too long dead for the American to hear his classic methods praised by those he met on his first visit to London. Even George Frederick Cooke (1756-1812) had just died when Forrest reached the age of six.

It might almost be said that the generation into which Forrest was born died within close range of his own demise, in 1872. His two bitter enemies, Macready and Dickens, passed within close range of him, Dickens in 1870 and Macready in 1873. The year he was born also ushered in his good friend, William Gilmore Simms, and his detestation, N. P. Willis. Emerson was three years his senior, Hawthorne two years; Longfellow one year his junior and Holmes three years. Of the dramatists of the Philadelphia School, whom he is supposed to have aided by his "munificent" prizes, all died before him. His political idols were also gone: the great Congressional school,—Webster, Clay, and Calhoun,—was no more; the Jackson Democracy, and the opposite faction, Whiggism, had passed into two clear-cut political parties familiar to us to-day. His friend, James Fenimore Cooper, died in 1851; his fellow-dramatist, John Howard Payne, passed away in 1852; his champions and judges, Halleck and Bryant, had either gone, as in the case of the

former in 1867, or were about to pass, as in the case of the latter in 1878. Charlotte Cushman, who was fighting for recognition in London, when Forrest was inviting upon himself a peck of trouble through his ill manners, survived him but four years. Mrs. Mowatt had been dead two years, and E. L. Davenport was to go in 1877.

Thus completely the era of Forrest was wiped out. The theories they upheld politically, the literature they imagined, and the style they used were no more. Theatre taste was to lose its classic quality. Forrest was the old man in a new age.

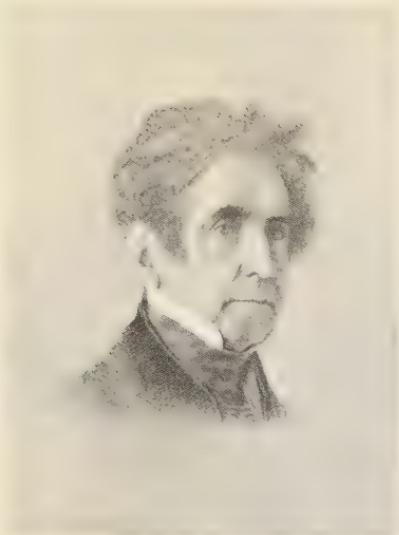
The critics of this period were very much concerned about the actors of their day; they were meticulous in the details they gave, the points they scored, the variations they made, the marked contrasts of characterization they saw. These critics were thoroughly familiar with the classics of the stage; they held theories regarding the art of acting; they had standards and were eager to see the theatre take its place among the necessary cultural institutions. In fact, the attitude of communities toward the itinerant actor was far removed from the individual Puritan prejudice against the actor as a vagabond and the theatre as a house of temptation, as a coarse or frivolous distraction from the serious contemplation of man's destiny and his spiritual estate. The contemporaneous feeling of Robert Treat Paine in Boston toward Thomas Abthorpe Cooper and Fennell; Isaac Harby's evaluation in South Carolina of the *Othello* and *Coriolanus*

of Cooper, the *Othello* and *Sir Giles Overreach* of Kean; the enthusiastic notations of William Coleman of the *New York Evening Post*, are measure of the stately seriousness of these gentlemen of the press. Even Forrest, always sensitive to criticism, singled out writers from whom he was willing to accept verbal strictures, and upon whose critical dicta he was willing to modify his work. Unfortunately, we have to rely upon these verbal paintings and sort our colors from their chance word. It is well for us to consider these official remarks; it not only aids us in reaching an estimate of the actor but of the state of the critical mind toward the theatre. Take such words as these, written by Paine:

In the natural gifts and requisites of an actor, Mr. Cooper has never had a competitor on the American stage; and in good sooth it must be said, that "speech famed" Fennell has gathered much lore at the feet of Cratippus.

And the critic of those days really knew who Cratippus was! Speaking of Fennell's limitations, Paine declared:

It should be recollected, that he had to contend against many glaring natural disabilities for the character of a dramatic lover; a voice, obstinately sepulchral, a face, incapable of the lineaments of tenderness, a ponderous and overwhelming gesticulation, and an awkward majesty and indecision of movement; the whole exhibiting rather a false fulness, than a definite expression of sentiment.



WILLIAM B. WOOD



EDMUND KEAN AS  
*RICHARD III*



THOMAS ABTHORPE  
COOPER



WILLIAM AUGUSTUS  
CONWAY, SENIOR



The lineaments of the old school thus become defined, and in those days of theatre-going, the portraiture were zealously watched. For there was competition among favorites. Such writers as Dunlap and Clapp, however, had an eye for the physical particularities. Wrote the former of Fennell, "He was a remarkably handsome figure, although above the just height, being considerably over six feet; his complexion and hair light, with a blush ready for every occasion. His features were not handsome, his nose being round, thick, or too fleshy, and his eyes a very light grey, with yellowish lashes and brows."

Quoting T. A. Cooper, who used to exclaim, when Fennell approached, "Here come two yards of a very proper man", Clapp shows him "the companion of all the dissipated limbs of aristocracy."

Down in South Carolina, Harby was equally as watchful, equally as bold and assertive. He does not stop hesitantly before any of the shrines of the Muses. He criticizes Shakespeare for his flaws, those "revolting dashes of the brush which mar what should have been carefully elaborated"; and he denotes the varying degrees of style in the players. For instance :

The classic elegance of Cooper, assisted by his matchless voice: — the majesty of Conway, aided by his refined taste and study, have furnished models, which those similarly gifted may pursue. But the style of Kean owes its vigour and brilliancy to the impulses of an ardent mind that overcomes the disadvantages of nature — to the

despotic sway of a genius which conquers, because it wills to conquer.

There is the tang of oratorical rhythm about all this, dominant over the critical understanding. The critic of the theatre becomes correct rather than illuminating, except in so far as he displays his own taste and shows what he is looking for. Thus, we realize, through naïve confession, how suspiciously the Gentleman of the Old Stock regarded any semblance of naturalness, either in acting or in play-writing, by these words of Harby; speaking of *Sir Giles Overreach*, he says:

It is one of those parts which, constructed upon the excellent design of the middle comedy, is never so far removed from common life as to lift the actor upon tragic stilts; nor so very familiar with our everyday objects, as to lose ought of freshness or of vigour.

Certainly the acting of that day was unbending, statuesque, almost haughty; muscles fell into place, the voice was tuned to a recognized pitch and timbre. Tragedy on stilts with a megaphone is the cartoon impression.

At the same time, regarding the stage in London, we were securing a critical view richer and fuller and more to be relied on as to accuracy, because theatre criticism was an art and not a gentleman's pastime. William Hazlitt spoke of John P. Kemble as being happier when he wore the paraphernalia of greatness than when he tried to depict the simple man. "He is the statue on the pedestal,"

so Hazlitt writes, "that cannot come down without danger of shaming its worshippers; a figure that tells well with appropriate scenery and dresses, but not otherwise. . . . He will not lend dignity to the mean, spirit to the familiar; he will not impart life and motion, passion and imagination, to all around him, for he has neither life nor motion, passion nor imagination in himself." He commanded respect, declared Macready, but did not excite the sympathies.

Against this statuesque school, Kean came with a cataclysmic reversal. The little man rose to heights in the greatness of his passion. He broke up time-honored custom. He turned his back on the audience and spoke in a natural voice. This vagabond of the road, this wild, restless runner to sea, this unwise, mad, feverish adept of the wine bottle, electrified his audiences and established a new era. "His style," declared Vandenhoff, "was impulsive, fitful, flashing, abounding in quick transitions; scarcely giving you time to think, but ravishing your wonder, and carrying you along with his impetuous rush and change of expression."

Such a man was likely to catch the fancy of Forrest. His resentfulness of aristocracy, his obscurity of background, his independence of manner were characteristics not strangers to our American player. He was a marvellous genius, with all the erratic behavior of the genius; but where his work was concerned his technique was sure, unvarying. Old Doctor Francis, who is an excellent supplement or complement to Philip Hone — both

of them full of the small gossip of New York City in early days — called him a child, and described the great tragedian walking up Broadway and standing in front of Trinity Church, listening to the chimes, then breaking forth himself into song — “Those Evening Bells” and “Come O’er the Sea.” Kean singing! It was enough music to hear him speak. His reading, so declared Vandenhoff, was a perfect musical score of modulation.

Then we turn to George Henry Lewes, with his ineffaceable boyhood memory of Kean, and we learn of the tragedian’s tricky and flashy style, of his limited miming power, of his physical aptitudes confined strictly to tragedy, of his inability to sustain anything but strong emotion, being uncomfortable in interstices of low emotional pitch. For Kean was anxious to reach “points.” At the interval of rest he was restless; at the greatest swell of passion he was remarkable for intensity. He could however control unerringly the gradations of retiring emotion. A shambling man in person, on the stage he was grace personified in the depiction of terror. But his gayety was dull, as dull as his passion was illuminating. He had the dangerous lightness of the panther, the noble strength of the lion. Only in parts demanding such characteristics was he supreme. In these rôles he established tradition. He created “business” for *Othello*, *Lear*, *Richard*, *Shylock*, *Sir Edward Mortimer*, *Sir Giles Overreach*, which for others to ignore, to fail to perpetuate, was to be impervious to the unchangeable.

#### A CURTAIN LECTURE

It was this man who praised Forrest in a speech and won from him undying devotion and loyalty. This madman, who was always on the verge of violence, early recognized the power of the American. When Forrest supported him during the Albany engagement, he called upon the great actor to find out certain "business" which he, *Iago*, had to use. "My boy," exclaimed Kean, "all I ask of you is to keep in front of me and never let your attention wander." Then at rehearsal he saw what original material was in the boy, who gave to his *Iago* vigorous readings.

"My God," exclaimed Kean, "who told you to do that?"

"It's my own idea," explained Forrest.

"Well, my boy, every one who plays *Iago* after you will have to do it too."

There was no average talent in Edwin Forrest.

Kean had lived through days of riot, when he had crossed paths with Junius Brutus Booth. The two had been played against each other in London; they had simulated friendship and had broken contracts. They were almost as much alike as the two *Dromios*, and the similarities were a great handicap to Booth, who possessed characteristics of his own and was not a slavish facsimile of Kean, however much the London Keanites might think to the contrary. Nor was Booth driven to America, though the ordeal of competing with Kean must have worn heavily on his brooding temper and added to his irritability. Strange that geniuses like Garrick, Kean, and Booth should have had such physical

handicaps as they possessed — so different from Forrest's robustness. Yet, under the spell of either, the audience forgot their lack of stature and saw only what Byron saw in Kean — a soul; what Coleridge saw in Kean's *Macbeth* — flashes of lightning; what Walt Whitman felt in Booth — fire, energy, abandon. The actors of those days aimed to make the pit tremble. Did not Kean exclaim to his much-to-be-pitied wife, when she asked him what Lord Essex thought of his *Sir Giles Overreach*, "Damn Lord Essex, the pit rose at me!" We wonder how far Forrest recalled this when he exclaimed to the reticent young man who had praised his *Lear*, "By God, sir, I am King Lear!"

This was the era of theatrical combat; opening nights were not perfunctory trials but evenings to be remembered, as William Godwin said was the evening when he witnessed Booth's *Iago* to Kean's *Othello*. Actors trod close upon each other's footsteps, in the same rôle, hence the inevitable charges of plagiarism. John Howard Payne, when he saw Kean, thought he witnessed a copy of George Frederick Cooke, even though Kean declared he had never seen Cooke. The manner, the style were in the air! The actors of note all declared fealty to the tradition. It was a direct line, and Forrest was of the coterie, though removed somewhat from the direct brilliancy of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which used to thrill Lamb and Hazlitt. Cooke takes us back to Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, and Kemble. Cooper, with his English beginnings, relates us to

#### A CURTAIN LECTURE

the days when Thomas Wignell was managing companies in Philadelphia. To mention Cooper is to awaken the era of Fennell and Hodgkinson. The dignity of Cooper was nearer Kemble than Kean. Ireland thought him "an almost perfect specimen of manly beauty." He rose, as all actors of his day rose, to heights through excitement. But he had, what Fennell possessed, an intelligent control of himself.

The examples of such men could not but have had a great effect on the life of Edwin Forrest. Cooke and Kean and Booth had been victims of their love for toddy; they had burned themselves out, and Forrest's avowed dislike of drink may have been partly influenced by these mad examples. Cooper had been improvident and recklessly extravagant. Forrest had in his youth suffered the pinched conditions of poverty, and this may not only have made him work astutely to accumulate a fortune, but may have had a great deal to do with his later penurious attitude under certain conditions. William Augustus Conway had, like Booth, given way before a sudden spell of melancholy and had thrown himself to destruction in the sea. Forrest fought any physical weakness of mind and body by exercise, hoping against hope to keep himself in fit condition.

His was a school of grandeur, of sound teaching, and of strenuous practice. When critics spoke of Conway's fine figure as being so suited to the rôle of *Coriolanus*, it becomes apparent that outward dignity, external statuesqueness, the grand man-

ner, were as much parts of the acting of the day as was the well-rounded utterance. Leigh Hunt declared that what made the critics like Kemble was his stern Roman aspect. It is a commentary on the differences in mental attitudes between Forrest and Macready that the latter has left discerning remarks on the actors whom we claim to have pre-determined Forrest's background; and the American actor has left nothing but a stately reverence for his models, without comment. In fact, the silence of Forrest regarding the art of the actor, save a casual reference here and there, would indicate that his own practice was outward rather than inward. In fact, so outward that he sought to "fix" the impression in pictures. His acting was himself — depths of voice, pauses, starts, beetling glances, display of biceps, short firmness of leg muscles. One went to the Mammoth Cave to see a marvel of nature. Forrest's acting had about it the same show quality. Outward expression and pose of majesty and power were there, with cavernous depths within, but there seemed to be lacking those qualities of mind and spirit which are measure of the greatest acting.

### CHAPTER III

#### FORREST SETS FORTH PIONEERING

Forrest now faced the typical experience of the actor of his time. He was to see the country young, scarcely opened, represented by groups of villages which later he was to view springing into stalwart towns and cities. In this respect, the American actor was truly a pioneer; he had to meet uncomplainingly the precarious means of transportation afforded the traveler — coach, diligence, wagon, palpitating locomotive trying its power with wood fire over conglomerate gauge tracks, flatboats drawn by horses from the shore, sailboats with scenery for rigging. The actor needed to be a backwoodsman, skilled with rod and gun; he needed to be not over particular where his food was procured or by what means it was got; he must build camp fires, stalk the deer, forage, watch out for snags along the shore lines, likely to wreck all cargo and to jeopardize all lives, if time engagements necessitated his floating downstream by night. He must needs be a bargainer, swapping his teams for boats; he must needs be a contractor, seeing that a town have its theatre, if no such thing existed before he came. He was ready to be faced by all sorts of audiences,

huddled in dimly lighted, narrow rooms, or gentlemen farmers who came as eagerly their many miles on horseback to witness their Shakespeare as they came to market or to court — their two contacts with the world outside their broad acres.

Strange that the historian has failed to regard as authentic data those reminiscences which detail the difficult lot of the traveling player in Forrest's early manhood. The year is 1822, the salary eight dollars a week; the scene can be picked up from the pages of Ludlow, Sol Smith, and Caldwell — managers under whom Forrest was to serve his novitiate. The time of Forrest's *début* was but two years back of him, and the title of "Master Forrest" had barely lifted from him, though he had won his laurels as *Richard III*. He was intense, fervent, ambitious. "The Young Gentleman of this City", who had preceded his first night on the professional stage by intensive lessons in elocution, was eager to better himself, and was writing poetry. He was mulling over the advice received from Cooper; he was writing to James Caldwell, in New Orleans, December 6, 1820, begging for an engagement and giving a list of his rôles — *Douglas*, *Octavian*, *Chamont*, *Zanga*, *Tancred* — and pleading with James Hewitt, September 7, 1822, to engage him for his Charleston Stock Company.

In September, 1822, the proprietors of a chain of theatres in Pittsburgh, Lexington, and Cincinnati, Messrs. Collins and Jones (friends of Ludlow, and like Ludlow and Sol Smith, trail-blazers in isolated

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districts of the South and West), came to Philadelphia to recruit a company. Among others, they recruited Forrest. So it was that, with his little trunk, heavily laden with his few clothes and his slim library of books, he joined fortunes with Mrs. Pelby, Mrs. Riddle, and her two daughters, Sallie and Eliza, Miss Fenton, and others. He seems to have delighted the Pittsburgh theatregoers with his *Norval*, but he had not fully recovered from the strenuousness of travel, nor was the novelty of the town sufficiently alluring to allay his homesickness. A letter to his mother, dated October 10, 1822, reflects his feelings immediately after arriving:

I am quite out of patience riding so long in the stage over such tremendous mountains, but was greatly delighted, on reaching the summit of them, to view the surrounding country, — so vast and varied a landscape.

Even then Pittsburgh was black and smoky; even then it could boast of a very old theatre. So early as 1815, Ludlow noted that in this mid-Western town "there is scarcely a building but presents a sombre or almost black appearance." Forrest would brighten his days with news of every one. He is very particular. "This, you know, is the first time I have been away from you," he explains, with justifiable excuse. He wants every particular and "pray pay the postage, as I am out of funds."

For five days and nights they floated down the Ohio to Maysville, Kentucky. We must listen to Ludlow, in his "Dramatic Life as I Found It", for

similar experiences. There was little improvement in transportation since the year 1815; then it had taken him six days to go from Pittsburgh to Maysville. He was covering the same ground as Forrest, who was next destined for Lexington, full of well-to-do people, a journey by wagons and on horseback. Here was situated the Transylvania University, under the learned Doctor Horace Holley, and it was through the gaining of his friendship and that of one of the students, James Taylor, that the first monotony of loneliness was broken for Forrest. He listened to the advice of the enthusiastic college president, who would have him relinquish all rôles in comic vein and concentrate on tragedy.

Collins and Jones must have been well patronized by the student body, for the engagement did not end till February 22, 1823, and then, in circuit fashion, they made for Cincinnati, where they opened at the Columbia Theatre in "The Soldier's Daughter", Forrest cast for *Malfort*, a serious "walking gentleman's" part. But his work was not all serious, despite the admonition of Holley. He had to dance in such popular ballets as "Little Red Riding Hood"; he was called upon to sing comic songs between acts, even dressing as the daughter of an old soldier, who happened to be Eberle, the scene painter, who could also play the violin. Here, too, he had a taste of future work by assuming second parts to *Damon*, *Brutus*, and *Virginius*. Sol Smith and Moses Dawson were writing for the Cincinnati papers at the time; they saw through the earnest efforts of this



Courtesy of the *President's* *Gravures*

VIEW OF CAIRO, ILLINOIS, IN 1838

*A river scene familiar to the pioneer actor.*



young fledgling and did not hesitate to prophecy great things for him. Indeed, Dawson outdid himself in the analysis of Forrest's *Richard III*. With stately majesty of demeanor, possessing the power of intense concentration, with the ability of forcibly portraying horror and despair, this new *Richard* was a notable achievement. But, warned this critic out of the West, "we hope his good sense will prevent him from being so intoxicated with success as to neglect study and industry." The company of 1823, says Sol Smith, consisted of Messrs. Collins, Jones, Scott, Forrest, Davis, Eberle, Henderson, Groshon; Mrs. Pelby, Mrs. Riddle, Miss Riddle, Miss Fenton, and Miss Eliza Riddle (a child).

His was the usual fate of the itinerant player; hardship is the tale told by all actors in their beginnings. But there must have been about the boy qualities of unusual distinction to attract to him the interest of men in walks of life far removed from the stage. Thus, in Cincinnati, he won the friendship of William Henry Harrison, hero of Tippecanoe, whose accounts of Tecumseh's depredations on the settlers of Indiana (1811) may have been among the initial sources of inspiration for "Metamora." It was through the General's solicitude that he found a decent boarding place with the widow Bryson. He is too exceptional a lad, argued Harrison, to let loose.

But theatricals did not prosper around Cincinnati with the Collins and Jones Company, and so these wanderers in the wilds were turned adrift. Like

gypsies of the same blood, some of the remnants banded themselves together, held in organization largely by the adventurous energy of Forrest and by the forceful character of Mrs. Riddle. They barnstormed with a vengeance in this summer of 1823. Their great bugaboo was the sheriff and attachment! Lebanon treated them kindly but withheld its money. At Dayton, the final dregs of their thread-bare salaries were reached, and again it was voted to separate. Conditions were desperate. Forrest set out afoot for Cincinnati; once he tried to steal a canoe on the Miami River, but it was locked at its moorings, and its owner threatened to fire upon the marauder. It is difficult either to kill or to discourage the itinerant player; theatre history shows this. Fagged and penniless, Forrest reached Cincinnati and told some of his friends of his sorry plight.

“There is an amateur club across the river at Newport,” one of them suggested. “They need a man to take the place of one of their actors, too drunk to appear. Will you go for five dollars and fill the gap in the farce, ‘A Miss in Her Teens’?” Like Simple Simon’s pieman, the youth consented, provided first they showed him the five dollars!

Much like steel particles around a magnet, the struggling actors gathered once more in Cincinnati, and a primitive Globe Theatre was rigged up next door to the Globe Inn. On June 2, 1823, Forrest was playing *Norval*, and on the evening of June 4, *Sir Edward Mortimer*, in “The Iron Chest”, to the *Lady Helen* of Mrs. Riddle. But again they faced

insolvency. It did not seem that Forrest's *George Barnwell*, his *Jaffier*, or his *Richard III* had set the Ohio on fire.

At this time he joined the ranks of the cork-faced players. The name of Sol Smith looms large in the history of theatricals of the West and South; he vied with Ludlow in claims of pioneering the western and southern country theatrically. Great jealousy was shown between them as to who got there first. We have already noted Smith as editor of a Cincinnati newspaper and as dramatic critic. It was the failure of Collins and Jones that started his career in the theatre. He leased the *Globe* for one night as an experiment and put on "Modern Fashions", by his brother, Martin Smith, and "The Tailor in Distress", a local skit by himself. In these, Forrest had the varied experience of playing a dandy in the first piece, a Negro in the skit, and *Sancho Panza* in a pantomime. For which versatility he received the munificent sum of two dollars! In the history of the American Theatre, Forrest may therefore take his place as one of the progenitors of minstrelsy.

Yet it would never do for him to be wasting his time, however agreeable it might be for Forrest to bask in the sunlight of the Riddle primitive home at Newport, where he went, destitute of all means of livelihood. In after years, he described to Alger his depredations upon a neighboring cornfield for sustenance. Fortunately, youth is the period of tenacious expectancy, and the young actor drowned

the pangs of hunger by reading his Shakespeare. He had written to Caldwell down in New Orleans, but one of the Riddle girls was tugging at his heart-strings, and the Crescent City seemed very far away. If only Sol Smith would take him and save him the trip! In sheer desperation, he joined a circus which happened to be near — our future tragedian turned acrobat. He was in one of his “pets”, declares Sol Smith, for, in reality, he was under contract to Caldwell. This riding and tumbling stunt of his was a subterfuge. Writes Smith :

I called in at the Circus, and, sure enough, there was Ned in all his glory, surrounded by riders, tumblers, and grooms. He was a little abashed at seeing me, but, putting a good face on the matter, he said he had made up his mind not to go to New Orleans, and, having been refused an engagement at ten dollars a week by me, he had engaged “with these boys” at twelve. To convince me of his ability to sustain his new line of business, he turned a couple of flip-flaps on the spot. I asked him to walk with me to my lodgings, where, by dint of hard lecturing and strong argument, I prevailed on him to abandon his new profession, and commence his journey to New Orleans immediately.

Thus, from Louisville, Forrest took steamboat down the Ohio to the Mississippi, on his way South. On board, he spent his time in companionship with John Howard Payne and Winfield Scott, so says Alger. But this could not be, for Payne was still abroad, and was not to return to this country until 1832, when, in celebration (November 29, 1832),

Forrest, Charles, and Fanny Kemble, T. A. Cooper, J. W. Wallack, and others appeared in a gala homecoming testimonial. So much for accuracy!

Boat travel in those early days sounded better than in reality it was. Ludlow describes his impressions, going to Nashville on the formidable *Leopard*:

She was the most miserable apology for a steamboat that could have been started anywhere — [he writes] — even in those primitive days of steamboating. The main shaft of this boat was made of *wood*, with four or five buckets on each end about the dimensions of a laundress's washboard; and her *power*, I imagine, must have been *one mule and a jackass*.

Whenever steam threatened to give out, then was the time for landing, and "hands" and passengers would fall to and cut enough wood to go a bit farther. Always, in the travel of those days, one spent more time stopping than going. Steamboats and locomotives needed urging. They would stop still if currents were opposing or if hills were too steep. One had to walk uphill for the "loco-motive", as one humored an overloaded donkey.

So it was that often the actor smiled with pleasure at the prospect of a three hundred mile horseback ride rather than such experiences. There was exhilaration in the very adventure of it, to judge by the genial accounts given by Tyrone Power of his various excursions during 1832. Internal improvements had not yet become a national question. We were just on the verge of a highway policy, but we

were yet primitive. John Calhoun was firm in his belief that the Republic should be knit fast by a perfect system of roads and canals. Henry Clay was equally as ardent in his pleas. The actor took conditions as he found them — ploughed through the mud, or dashed irregularly over corduroy roads, meeting emigrant trains bound for some outpost, exchanging views at the turnpike with all sorts and conditions of people; East and West and South — it was all the same. The stagecoach was just as doubtful and irksome; Ludlow tells of traveling uphill in New Jersey, —

when my wife called my attention to a back wheel of the coach which had come off, and was rolling down the ground behind us. Others saw it about the same moment, and the ladies were preparing to jump out of the coach windows. . . . The horses were at full speed, which the driver kept up until he was able to sheer them in against a post, which struck the front axletree and stopped their speed; the coach then rolled over on one side, and the passengers came down together in one mass within the coach body.

To read Smith and Ludlow is to get fiction at its highest tension, to illuminate background with live condition, to enjoy anecdote with the rich tinge of rustic, pioneer manner. These players were jovial beings, looking for small towns in which to give fine entertainments and to meet folks socially. Communities underwent any hardships to see the players, who relieved them for the moment of the strenuous problems of pioneer existence. But whether actor

or settler, there was a quality of adaptability about these early Americans that was very thrilling. It was easy to tie up a boat to some landing where a clump of houses promised patronage and stay awhile. Power presents a delectable picture of the Mississippi Theatre which floated downstream in this casual manner, under the management of William Chapman :

It is projected and carried on by the elder Chapman, well-known for many years as a Covent Garden actor; his practise is to have a building suitable to his views, erected upon a raft at some high point up the Mississippi, or on one of its tributaries, whence he takes his departure early in the fall, with scenery, dresses, and decorations, all prepared for representation. At each village or large plantation he hoists a banner and blows a trumpet, and few who love a play suffer his ark to pass the door, since they know it is to return no more until the next year; for, however easy may prove the downward course of the drama's temple, to retrograde upwards, is quite beyond its power. Sometimes a larger steamer from Louisville, with a thousand souls on board, will command a play whilst taking on fuel, when the profit must be famous. The corps dramatique is, I believe, principally composed of his own family, which is numerous, and, despite of alligators and yellow fever, likely to increase and flourish. When the Mississippi Theatre reaches New Orleans, it is abandoned and sold for firewood; the manager and troop returning in a steamer to build a new one, with such improvements as increased experience may have suggested.

Saddlebags and pistols by candlelight, and then thirty miles of rough going before the way was com-

fortable; down the river on a "broad-horn" at the rapid rate of four miles an hour, dividing an old "keel boat" into sleeping quarters, an eating room, and storage for the baggage — so these ambulatory players of the day went through the remote and unusual territory of the country. Risks had to be taken, whether or not the road was known, whether or not the waterway was charted. Land rats and water thieves infested the roadside and the shore. Indians gazed at the travelers from screened under-brush. Writes Smith:

The company travelled in barouches, and the baggage was sent in a large Pennsylvania road wagon. We passed through the Creek Nation about five years previous to the commencement of the disturbances which ended in sending the Indians to Arkansas.

As these players went their way, they brought the theatre trail where it had never been before. Thus Ludlow claims, and so does Sol Smith, that each opened theatres for the first time in places now grown to towns and cities of great size and importance. Sometimes there was opposition to this intrusion. For instance, in 1817, when Ludlow first reached New Orleans, the French and Spaniards were antagonistic toward any English-speaking companies invading their territory. It was not until after the War of 1812 that this feeling changed.

But the reminiscences left by these pioneers, with their descriptions of boat "caudling", of crude audiences in linsey-woolsey clothing and blanket coats,

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seated on wooden benches, before sputtering candles, in theatres which only yesterday were breweries and old salt houses with rancid flooring, are the real reflections of the theatrical times Edwin Forrest was going through. What happened to them might have happened to him — the atmosphere of drinking and gambling, of cheating at cards and of angry words over wine, of wild Virginia reels on shipboard while Negro labor hummed below decks.

In the twinkling of an eye any difficulty might arise and would have to be overcome. These actors traveled, not only intent on conquering audiences, but on overcoming physical obstacles. Sol Smith, engaged for Columbus, Georgia, found there was no theatre in which to act. Did it phase him? He gazed around the crude streets with Creek Indians mingled among the contented citizens. Sunday though it might be, a contractor was found, and the newspaper of the following Saturday contained this startling item :

**EXPEDITION.**—A theatre, 70 feet long by 40 wide, was commenced on Monday morning last by our enterprising fellow-citizen, Mr. Bates, and finished on Thursday afternoon, in season for the reception of Mr. Sol Smith's company on that evening. A great portion of the timber, on Monday morning, waved to the breeze in its native forest; four-score hours afterward, its massive piles were shaken by the thunder of applause in the crowded assemblage of men.

This was in 1832, the same year that Tyrone Power was giving us his impressions of America in diary

form. We find him in Natchez, Mississippi. He reached the theatre on the night of his first performance, too early for the audience. The lamplighter was just beginning to trim the wicks. So Power mounted his horse for a short cross-country canter. On his return, he passed his audience sauntering from isolated plantations to the scene of the play.

[The men were] clad in tunic or frock — [he wrote] — made of white or of grass-green blanketing, the broad dark-blue selvage serving as a binding, the coat being furnished with collar, shoulder-pieces and cuffs of the same color, and having a broad belt, either of leather or of the like selvage; broad-sheafed Spanish hats of beaver were evidently the mode, together with high leather leggings or cavalry boots and heavy spurs.

Such specific description did not end with these romantic peoples of the South; it particularized on the ornate regalia of their mounts.

They bore *demi-pique* saddles, with small, massive brass or plated stirrups, generally shabracas of bear or deer skin, and in many instances had saddle-cloths of scarlet or light blue, bound with broad gold or silver lace.

These conditions, experiences, and human sights were the ordinary lot of all “soubrettes” and “walking gentlemen” of the time. They knew the barking of wolves; they realized often the menace of milldams. But also they enjoyed at times the comfort of plantation life, with the big house, its out cottages, and sugar houses. They enjoyed the meeting with such men as Sam Houston and Mirabeau

Lamar; they crossed paths with Lafayette on his last trip to America, and talked with him of the technique of acting — in the primitive society of the South. It was not primitive, however, in the high state of cultivation that went on under a slave régime. A baronial luxury marked the way from Baton Rouge to New Orleans. And oftentimes these players brought with them the needs of the theatre and created comforts which the towns did not have. Ludlow, speaking of the first *American* theatre built in New Orleans by Caldwell, in 1822, records how he was also an innovator, using gas, and establishing a “gas works” for the town. This manager, meeting success with his new form of illumination, began persuading the city authorities of its practical nature, and got them to allow him to put gas lamps on Camp Street, leading to the theatre. This was the commencement of a “gas company” in New Orleans, of which Caldwell was the president for many years.

Forrest was going to a curiously interesting country theatrically. He was to participate in its life, braving all adventures and meeting with all the conditions detailed in books of theatre reminiscence. Ludlow, when he dedicated his “Dramatic Life as I Found It” to Forrest, did so largely because, as he said on the dedication page, “No one knew more thoroughly . . . the difficulties that had to be encountered by the pioneers of the Drama in the West.” We must add, as well, in the South. States were still territories in those days, and were only

slowly coming into the Union. Seats of government were to be changed, Cahawba, for instance, preceding Montgomery as the legislative centre of Alabama. Small though the towns were, isolated from the main stream of traffic, theatre companies sought them out, for there was always a refined taste, even amidst the crudest condition. Milledgeville was the executive centre of Georgia, when Sol Smith built his theatre in Columbus, and he was closely associated with Mirabeau Lamar, a candidate for Congress.

He was a good speaker — rather too vehement in his manner, perhaps; but, being well read, and possessing a good face and person, he enchain'd the attention of his auditors. . . . He could appreciate a joke and a good dinner; had Shakespeare at his tongue's end, and could quote him correctly and at pleasure; fenced well, and was otherwise highly accomplished.

Lamar journeyed with Smith one summer — electioneering and the drama hand in hand! But the backwoods settler eagerly sought the Thespian. What did Ludlow find when he first reached St. Louis in 1819? All the crude loneliness of a territorial settlement; but Governor William Clark (he of the Lewis and Clark expedition) had brought west some of the culture of Virginia, and did not attempt, as other localities did, to "tax" the drama. "Mr. Ludlow," he said decorously, "we feel too much complimented by you and your company visiting us to think of committing such an uncourteous act as *taxing* you." Thus it was that professionalism slipped into the amateur society quarters of the town



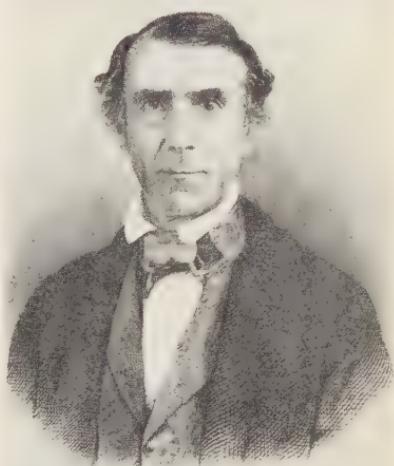
*From the Albert Davis Collection*  
JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH



SOLOMON F. SMITH



*Courtesy of Harvard College Library*  
FRANCIS COURTNEY  
WEMYSS



*Courtesy of Harvard College Library*  
JAMES H. CALDWELL



and gave regular performances in "San Louis." One cannot read the history of the American theatre without noting how generally widespread was the amateur movement throughout the country — an indication that under all conditions, in every strata of society, amusement must be assured. When Smith reached Montgomery, Alabama, on formal request from its citizens, entering town in large road wagons, after a five days' journey from Natchez, he occupied a *new* theatre built by a Thespian society. In Nashville, during 1818, Ludlow was asked to become autocratic head of an amateur theatrical society, which could boast among its actors Sam Houston, of San Jacinto fame, and among its honorary members, Andrew Jackson. In New Orleans and in Charleston this same amateur spirit was thriving.

The indomitable theatre courage cannot be underestimated. What prompted these pioneers in their persistency, other than a wild love of adventure and a "wanderlust" which came from the era when all actors were vagabonds, is difficult to say. For existence was precarious, profits were small, the presence of the sheriff imminent, and menacing health conditions — like yellow fever and cholera — always confronting them. Uncertainty of currency values in the unstable finances of new States made even the amounts gathered in nightly of uncertain worth. We can but credit these theatre people with the evangelical spirit of spreading the gospel of the theatre, and of being satisfied with a

life of variety. Smith found the small village of Selma, on the Alabama River, with only four hundred souls (a mixture of white, black, and children), paying him seventy dollars per night. In Memphis, for eight nights, the receipts totalled three hundred and nineteen dollars. In Bolivar, six nights amounted to one hundred and fifty-one dollars. There were towns on the theatrical map in those days never dreamt of to-day, but their small contributions to drama were thankfully received and were swept into the exchequer. At the end of a season, the manager thus totalled up. It is Sol Smith who is recording :

Total receipts — 46 weeks — \$20,885. Average per week, \$454; per night, counting the actual number of nights played, to wit, 262 nights, \$79.70. Profits of the year about \$4,000.

Yet profits were rare. For instance, Smith had a season of eight weeks in Mobile at the commencement of 1832 — forty performances yielding in receipts five thousand one hundred and forty-six dollars. The expenses, not reckoning traveling to and from Mobile, were five thousand one hundred and twenty-one dollars, leaving twenty-five dollars to show for the effort. And still, season in and season out, they traveled the same circuit, undaunted and joyous, acutely aware of the evolution of a nation.

The bare physical energy expended in such a life was enormous, but it was met with good grace. We extract passages from the journal of Smith :

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*Wednesday.* Rose at break of day. Horse at the door. Swallowed a cup of coffee while the boy was tying on leggins. Reached Washington at 8. Changed horses at 9 — again at 10 — and at 11. At 12 arrived at Port Gibson. Attended rehearsal — settled business with stage-manager. Dined at 4. Laid down and endeavored to sleep at 5. Up again at 6. Rubbed down and washed by Jim (a Negro boy). Dressed at 7. Acted the *Three Singles and Splash*. To bed at 11½.

*Thursday.* Rose and breakfasted at 9. At 10 attended rehearsal for the pieces of next day. At 1, leggins tied on, and braved the mud for a fifty miles' ride. Rain falling all the way. Arrived at Natchez at half past 6. Rubbed down and took supper. Acted *Ezekiel Homespun* and *Delph* to a poor house. To bed (stiff as steelyards) at 12.

Conditions of this sort were not likely to vary materially for many years to come. Internal improvements were slow, society was conservative and not subject to change, local tradition was not cordial to new ideas, most especially in the South, where a particular type of civilization, founded upon a rigid caste system, was wary of the newcomer, who settled rather than appeared merely as a visitor.

As has been noted, an English-speaking company in New Orleans, in 1818, was a novelty. The inimical attitude of the population — which was largely Creole — was discouraging, and the terror of yellow fever was uninviting. Yet James H. Caldwell and Ludlow braved both, and it was due to their pioneering in the Crescent City that America broke

into the theatre there at all. Ludlow is specific in his description :

The season progressed smoothly [in 1818], but we soon found we were too far removed from the American population to have that benefit of their support as we should have had if we had been nearer Canal Street; for even at that early day, although there were scarcely any buildings above Canal Street, yet the Americans were congregating in its vicinity, and very soon after they had crossed the "Rubicon", and began to receive the upper trade at the first possible landing. The commercial products of the Western States and Territories were then brought to the city through the medium of "keel" and "flat" boats almost entirely. There were not more than three or four steamboats then plying on the Mississippi River, and one of them went no higher than Natchez. . . . I have used the word "Rubicon" above, as significant of the condition of the population in New Orleans in 1817, inasmuch as it was considered venturing into an enemy's country to attempt to transact business above the line of the present Canal Street. The old French and Spanish settlers, who composed much the largest portion of the population of New Orleans, intended and believed, at that day, the city would be confined within the space now known as Canal, Rampart, and Esplanade Streets, bounded by the river on the east. Even as late as 1850, some old Frenchmen would refuse to acknowledge that portion of the city above Canal Street as anything but the "Suburb Saint Marie."

This was the city toward which Edwin Forrest was making his way — a city of strange and colorful contrasts, where *gens d'armes* and footpads, patricians and a heterogeneous wharf coterie gave

an unusual tone to the local life. Both Caldwell and Ludlow found it difficult to upset the foreign prejudice against an American company. The French theatre, the quadroon ball, the affair of honor kept life busy. New Orleans, in 1842, appeared to the actor, George Vandenhoff, a "glowing, impassioned mixture of Southern and Creole nature." Watching the maze "of warm, voluptuous beauty", Vandenhoff marvelled at the girls who graced the select Re-unions of this city. It was a life of excitement. The actor, in his "Note-Book", describes the usual course of existence:

Sometimes, the ordinary flow of life was ruffled by a squall or two, which troubled its surface, dashed a little spray around, and all was right again. Now and then, a *duel à l'outrance* would furnish a day's interest; sometimes, the immense bar-room, in which thousands assembled at a time, was the scene of a little excitement: high words would be heard at one end; a scuffle, perhaps; a general clearing took place for a moment, a pistol-shot or two were fired, a body was carried out, the lookers-on closed up again, and the matter was forgotten. Or, the orderly current of a quadrille in a ball-room, or the mazy movements of the waltz, were broken by a quick and fatal stab, that left some much-coveted damsel *unpartnered* for a moment; but the music scarcely stops, the waters join, the half-uttered compliment is taken up again, the half-told anecdote is concluded, the interrupted laughter rings livelier, louder than before; . . . eyes sparkle, feet twinkle, white shoulders shine beneath a thousand lamps, swelling bosoms heave, and pant, and sigh, as triumph, love, or envy moves them; . . . and one

is bewildered by the many-tongued accents, that make the ball-room a Babel of confused delight.

Caldwell (1793-1863) had been identified with other Southern cities as manager and actor. He was a man of initiative, and, on the arrival of Forrest, took a great interest not only in his professional appearance, but in his social connections; for he was a man of considerable civic importance and had made friends with some of the aristocrats of the town. But he reckoned without his host, for Forrest, despite his youthful attractiveness, was not a social being in the conventional sense, and sought out the unusual, the rougher, the more picturesque types for companionship. The grace he found in these men was not of the subtle kind; it was the adventurous types he loved: James Bowie, inventor of the deadly knife which figured in backwoods disputes; Colonel Macaire, whose love for horses gave Forrest his first feeling for these animals, later to develop into a passion; Gazonac, a New Orleans gambler and duellist, with whom Forrest went swimming in Lake Pontchartrain, and who pointed out to him the pirate Lafitte; and finally Charles Graham, captain of a Mississippi steamer, by whom Forrest, in June, 1824, was nursed through a severe siege of malarial fever. These were Forrest's friends during his professional activity under Caldwell.

He opened in New Orleans, on February 4, 1824, at the American Theatre, in "Venice Preserved", playing *Jaffier* to Caldwell's *Pierre*. He was also seen as *Capt. Glenroy* in "Town and Country", and

as *Icilius* to the *Brutus* of *Pelby*. He was not a "star" but was only a modest member of the company; nor was he regarded as of exceptional merit, though Ludlow, who was with Caldwell at the time, having joined him in 1821, stood firm in his prophecy that Forrest was destined for high position.

Stock companies in those days separated their players into definite divisions. There were those suited to genteel comedy, others fit for low comedy; certain types were used for old men, heavy tragedy, dignified fathers, romps, juvenile tragedy; and they went so far as to have the sentimental comedy lady, and the respectable utility lady. Forrest did not, according to the stray lists of his rôles at this time, fall into any particular category, though, during this engagement, he prepared himself for the arduous part of *King Lear*. Ludlow mentions his appearing as *Frank Rochdale* in "John Bull" to Caldwell's *Peregrine* and Ludlow's *Tom Shuffleton*. But the Camp Street Theatre did not hail him as exceptional. If Caldwell joined the doubters, there may have been some reason for his lack of enthusiasm, as later events will show.

Alger paints the hero in glowing colors of adventure; he pictures the New Orleans experience with dime-novel emphasis, detailing graphically the delirium which seized Forrest during his malaria attack. But the young actor withstood its ravages and was able, in the early summer, to go with Caldwell and his company on tour to Virginia. From Petersburg, July 26, he wrote to his mother, in his

usual endearing terms, solicitous for news, and hoping to see her soon — a hope deferred, for he had another year of Southern experience. But he was developing his powers of self-assertiveness, even in his subordinate position, as a note from Fredericksburg, September 29, will indicate:

I performed *Pythias* for my opening here, and have succeeded to the delight of all the inhabitants. I had some difficulty with the manager again. He cast me, as an opening part, in *Mortimer* in the comedy of "Laugh When You Can." I refused to play it, and left the theatre. However, in two days, I saw my name in the bill for *Pythias*, and resumed my situation. All has gone on smoothly since, and I have triumphed over him as a tragedian in the opinions of those who recently esteemed him above praise or censure.

While in Virginia, Forrest saw and played before Chief Justice Marshall and Lafayette, but, though he was given to hero-worship, there were other things on his mind of a more personal concern, that had much to do with the difficulties which were apparently arising between himself and Caldwell. New Orleans was very familiar with the name of Placide. Alexandre (See Eola Willis: "The Charleston Stage in the XVIII Century") had arrived in this country during 1801, and became manager of a theatre in Charleston; he was co-partner in the management of the Richmond Theatre, in December, 1811, when it was burned to the ground, causing the death of many people. He then went to New Orleans. He was famed as a tight-rope walker, a pantomimist,



Courtesy of the Friedenberg Galleries

THE AMERICAN THEATRE, NEW ORLEANS, LA., *circa* 1830  
*In the days when French tradition ruled the city.*



and a dancer of supreme versatility. He was the father of a talented family, Henry and Tom Placide, Caroline — who afterwards became Mrs. W. R. Blake — and Jane Placide. The latter it was who made inroads into the heart of Edwin Forrest, and caused trouble between him and his manager.

Jane had been the reigning favorite in New Orleans for some time. Durang describes her as “the *beau ideal* of youthful tragedy, who possessed all the vigor and depth of passion’s power with its most feminine colorings.” When Thomas A. Cooper had visited the city in February, 1822, she had supported him in “Richard III”, “Damon and Pythias”, “Rule a Wife and Have a Wife”, and other pieces. She was the chief attraction while Forrest was with the company, and, when the American Theatre began a new season, on January 3, 1825, she was well enthroned in his heart. But the difficulty was that she was also enshrined in the affections of manager Caldwell. This situation did not add to the even tenor of the season. Forrest continued his work, appearing as *Malfort, Jr.*, in “The Soldier’s Daughter”, *Adrian* in “Adrian and Orilla”, the *Master of Ceremonies* in “Tom and Jerry”, and *Joseph Surface* in “The School for Scandal.” He also appeared in “The Falls of Clyde”, and as *Almanzor* in “The Conquest of Granada.”

The Louisiana *Advertiser* gave him small and respectful notice in its columns, but it allowed him at this time to occupy much more generous space with his halting verses, romantic, love-lorn, weak lines,

such as any youth might pen and in later years be ashamed of. Whether or not "To —" was some real person, the opening lines would apply equally as well to Jane Placide — "Thy spell, O Love, is elysium to my soul; Freely I yield me to thy sweet control"; whether or not "To Miss S — on Her Leaving Town" was another lambent spirit, the opening verses might easily have meant Jane:

Ah, go not hence, light of my saddened soul!  
Nor leave me in this absence to lament;  
Thy going sheds dark chaos o'er the whole,—  
A noonday night from angry Heaven sent."

From such lines on the death of a friend as these:

"I knew him well; his heart was pure and kind,  
A noble spirit and a lofty mind —

one might imagine Forrest giving weak imitation of Wordsworth.

The beauty and sweetness of Jane bred sure dissension, yet still the season progressed, adding more to the experience of the actor. On March 2, 1825, William Augustus Conway was the visiting star, opening in "Othello." Forrest was the *Iago* and was also the *Malcolm* to Conway's *Macbeth* later on. They were to play together again at the Bowery Theatre in New York.

Forrest's benefit was approaching, and the feeling between Caldwell and himself was becoming more and more strained. The young actor was preparing to give his first essayal of *Lear*, but Caldwell was seeing less and less in the ability of his rival,

and conflicting motives stood in the way of *Lear's* accomplishment. When the benefit night came, his public saw him in the rôle of *Octavian*, in Colman's "Mountaineers." Then came the close of the season with *Carwin* in Payne's "Thérèse."

Romantic difficulties now reached a head, Jane probably remaining a neutral eye-witness to the rising jealousy of Forrest and to the patronizing attitude of Caldwell. The latter would not take Forrest seriously, would not listen to the outbursts of his rising temper. The result was a flaming quarrel, probably one-sided; and, according to the code of the day, Forrest challenged his rival to mortal combat. The older man only laughed at the pose of his hot-headed challenger; he would not give the matter any consideration. This only added fuel to the flame and Edwin Forrest published a "Card" in the papers — the first of many he was afterwards to send forth as fiery manifestoes. It ran :

Whereas James H. Caldwell has wronged and insulted me, and refused me the satisfaction of a gentleman, I hereby denounce him as a scoundrel and post him as a coward.

EDWIN FORREST.

Thus ended his romance in New Orleans, for Caldwell only turned a deaf ear to the youth's impetuous protests. Jane Placide passed out of his life. I can find but one more reference to her, when Forrest was abroad on his "cultural tour." The lady had died in New Orleans, on May 16, 1835, and his diary contained this notice :

And so Jane Placide is dead. The theatrical people of New Orleans then have lost much. She imparted a grace and a force and dignity to her rôle which few actresses have been able so admirably to combine. She excelled in a profession in the arduous sphere of which even to succeed requires uncommon gifts, both mental and physical. Her disposition was as lovely as her person. Heaven lodge and rest her fair soul!

Thus in retrospect, but the immediate result of Forrest's challenge and its refusal was his flamboyant rejection of all civilized society; he had had enough of it, and eagerly he sought the companionship of another New Orleans friend he had made, Push-ma-ta-ha, a Choctaw chief — tall, lithe, a fine physical specimen of his race, upon whom Forrest looked with mounting admiration. The sentiment of the American toward the Indians of that day was much finer than the political dealings with them. Sir Walter Scott had set a style of romantic and historical fiction which Fenimore Cooper found particularly adaptable to the type of American romance he was turning out at this very time of Forrest's adventure — a type which, as Doctor Lounsbury has aptly said, appealed to the people rather than to highly cultivated men. It was the type which must have entranced Forrest. We might ask if "The Spy" (1821) and its brethren did not add, in the actor's mind, to the attractiveness of Push-ma-ta-ha, and, since the latter is supposed to have implanted in Forrest the initial idea for "Metamora", whether Cooper was not the fundamental

inspiration after all for this drama? There was that in the novelist's powers — his pugnacity, robust patriotism, flaunting democracy — which was in full accord with Forrest's nature.

Alger romances over this association of red man with white; he paints a scene of unequalled beauty, not only of physical surroundings but of manly vigor of body, and, in imitative Cooper style, he records fictitious conversations between these two companions. He even, probably at Forrest's suggestion, had the latter comment, in after years, on the inspiration of this visit. "My God", the actor is made to say, "what a contrast Push-mata-ha was to some fashionable men I have since seen, half made up of false teeth, false hair, padding, gloves, and spectacles!" A thoroughly consistent comment for him to make, however it might, in the reverend-author's story, be fabricated to mark a moral and adorn a tale.

We do not hear of Forrest working politically in the interests of the Indian, as Payne, his interest awakened, during 1835, worked for the Cherokees of Georgia. Through Payne, the red men learned how best to appeal to the Government for protection against the border agents, and Payne even suffered a short imprisonment because of his interference, until the matter was taken up by his friends with the Secretary of War in Washington. Forrest's fervor for the Indian seems to have died out when his sentiments were embodied in "Metamora."

## THE FABULOUS FORREST

In August, 1825, the heart-weary, tanned young actor burst in upon his mother, who was living on Cedar Street, in Philadelphia. His first professional tour had ended.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EAGLE AWAKENS

There is nothing more difficult to unravel than the seasonal wanderings of the old-time actor. Not having a large company to carry with him, after he became a star, he could slip from locality to locality as quickly as traveling conditions would allow, and so he was enabled to cover the whole theatrical territory and add lustre to the history of local theatres. Edwin Forrest was approaching his full period. The financial anxieties with which his Southern career had been punctuated were about to end with a final flare of scrimping at Albany. The wild excitement and stimulation which he faced were exhilarating to such a temperament as his, but he was equally as prone to brood over any injustice, and, at one time, after his season in Albany, which, while successful as far as gaining experience was concerned, left him stranded in New York with no money, no friends, his clothes in pawn and very homesick, Forrest actually bought some arsenic with determination to end it all. The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune were certainly pounding him sharply and hurtfully.

The nine years which Forrest now faced were to

be the determining ones in his career; he was in this time to display all his talents, he was to define his mental sympathies and to fix in the mind of the public what they might expect of him in the way of repertory. For, in comparison with his rival, William Macready, the scope of Forrest's art was narrow. During these years he was also to encourage American playwriting and show thereby his astuteness as a business man. Meeting success with a few of his prize plays, he was to discard those which did not suit his physical demands, and, year in and year out, to appear in the same round of characters. He faced a period of unprecedented energy and concentration, during which he laid the foundations of his fortune and showered devotion on his family in sincere but proud and haughty manner. He was to be continually thrown in competition with actors who, in many respects, were of finer calibre than he, and was, for the first and last time, to regard himself with sufficient humility to send him abroad in search of education.

All this was before him when he turned to Albany and accepted a position under manager Charles Gilfert, at the Pearl Street Theatre. Delightful are the records of that theatrical city as detailed by Messrs. Phelps and Stone, wherein we catch glimpses of Forrest as a gay young spark, disturbing the peace by wild pranks which often landed him and his companions in the hands of the city "leather-heads" or policemen, who threatened them with the watch-house. On one such occasion Forrest turned upon

these long arms of the law and began spouting Shakespeare in such a manner as to send electric thrills through the dark and silent streets, and while these rural Dogberries hearkened in amazement, the unruly company slipped away, leaving Forrest to await results. The outcome was fit reward for such eloquence. The guardians of the peace let the actor go, realizing mutely the power of his voice, but also understanding the humor of being duped. Once more he was caught by the law with his associates of the town and brought before the Justice of the Peace, after a night of confinement. The offenders were discharged on a trivial count of the law, and, as Forrest was leaving the august presence, he again resorted to Shakespeare. In true tragic grace he said to the Albany Squire:

“What’s the matter  
That you unlace your reputation thus,  
And spend your rich opinion, for the name  
Of a night-brawler?”

The old Pearl Street Theatre witnessed Forrest’s Albany début in the autumn of 1825, as *Jaffier*, for the benefit of a member of the stock company. His contract with Gilfert called for him to play leads in the company and to take second parts for visiting stars. W. A. Conway reached Albany in September, 1825, and opened on the 30th, as *Macbeth*, the young actor playing *Macduff*. Then he presented Knowles’ “*William Tell*”, Forrest playing *Michael*. It was perhaps as *Mark Antony* to Conway’s *Brutus* that the Albanians first realized the power of this young

man. So struck was Major M. M. Noah, New York editor and author, with the performance, that he records a conversation he had, immediately after, with the manager of the theatre. He writes:

Returning to Congress Hall, I found Gilfert rapidly eating his lunch of corned beef and horse-radish. We commenced the following dialogue: "Gilfert, who is that young man who played *Mark Antony*?" "His name is Forrest." "Where from?" "Philadelphia, I believe." "What's his character?" "Good." "Is he sober — steady?" "Yes." "Keeps good company?" "Why, I believe so." "Always perfect in his parts?" "Always perfect." "How long have you engaged him?" "For a year or two." "What salary?" "Very small."

We paused while Gilfert got through his supper, and, after a glass of brandy and water, he looked at us across the table, over his specs, in his peculiar way, and said:

"Tell me, Noah, why you ask me those questions about that young man?"

"Because," said I, "he has all the materials of a great actor, and, if his habits are good, we would advise you to make a long engagement with him, and by all means increase his salary."

Gilfert lighted his candle and went to bed. He subsequently told us that he had extended the time of his engagement with him, and, when the Bowery Theatre first opened, we all agreed to make Forrest a star. . . .

Thus records the old friend of managers Price and Simpson, who had written melodramas and librettos for the theatre, and was known to the green-rooms of the day. The success in *Antony* put a

steadyng weight on young Forrest's behavior. No more jollity, no more excesses, but down to the serious business of the tragedian !

A year afterwards, William Macready, with his wife and sister, braved a twenty-five day trip across the ocean to New York. His famous Diaries had not begun then, but his Reminiscences included 1826, written unfortunately from the after years' point of view. We have from him his first impression of Forrest; if only it had been penned before the two were known to each other, we would have been able to weigh the unbiased judgment of a man naturally jealous. Not quite unbiased, however, for Gilfert was then playing Forrest against Macready, who was at the Park Theatre. December 1, 1826, was the evening when Forrest again supported Conway in "Julius Caesar." Macready, by no means in a happy period of his life — William Archer calls this time "The Doldrums" for him — was in the audience. He records :

Forrest was the *Mark Antony*. He was a very young man, not more, I believe, than one or two and twenty. The "Bowery lads", as they were termed, made great account of him, and he certainly was possessed of remarkable qualifications. His figure was good, though, perhaps, a little too heavy; his face might be considered handsome, his voice excellent; he was gifted with extraordinary strength of limb, to which he omitted no opportunity of giving prominence. He had received only the commonest education, but, in his reading of the text, he showed the discernment and good sense of an intellect

much upon a level with that of Conway ; but he had more energy, and was altogether distinguished by powers that under proper direction might be productive of great effect. I saw him again in "William Tell." His performance was marked by vehemence and rude force that told upon his hearers ; but of pathos in the affecting interview with his son, there was not the slightest touch, and it was evident that he had not rightly understood some passages in his text. My observation upon him was not hastily pronounced. My impression was that, possessed of natural requisites in no ordinary degree, he might, upon careful discipline, confidently look forward to eminence in his profession. If he would give himself up to a severe study of his art, and improve himself by the practice he could obtain before the audiences of the principal theatres in Great Britain, those of Edinburgh, Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, etc. (then good dramatic schools), he might make himself a first-rate actor. But, to such a course of self-denying training I was certain he never would submit, as its necessity would not be made apparent to him. The injudicious and ignorant flattery, and the factious applause of his supporters in low-priced theatres, would fill his purse, would blind him to his deficiency in taste and judgment, and satisfy his vanity, confirming his self-opinion of attained perfection. I spoke of him constantly as a young man of unquestionable promise, but I doubted his submission to the inexorable conditions for reaching excellence. The event has been as I anticipated. His robustious style gains applause in the coarse melodramas of "Spartacus" and "Metamora" ; but the traits of character in Shakespeare and the poetry of the legitimate drama are beyond his grasp.

During his first two engagements in America, Macready was showing his true colors; he had his hands full of trouble when he undertook to visit us a third time. There was one thing in his favor; he was a social success. Unfortunate that during his engagement of 1826-1827 no records were made of Conway's opinion of his acting, for Macready had played with him, *Jaffier* to his *Pierre*; *Romont* to his *Charlois*, *John* to his *Faulconbridge*, *Henry IV* to his *Prince of Wales*, *Cassius* to his *Brutus*.<sup>1</sup> This was at the aristocratic Park Theatre. The *Mirror*, enthusiastic over such a brilliant combination, scolded New Yorkers for their carping over differences between actors; why not take each in his turn and on his own merits? Audiences had had ample opportunity of judging Macready's versatility. During his visit, he had given sufficient cause for theatregoers to rejoice over manager Price's success in sending stars to America — a Charles Frohman before his time, only under old stock conditions. What a *Virginius* was there, what a *Macbeth* — the best ever in the growing metropolis of New York! Then there were *William Tell* and *Damon* — and, dubious portent, *Coriolanus*, the very night of the opening of the Bowery Theatre, so indissolubly linked at this period with the advancement of Edwin Forrest.

Macready swept New York with enthusiasm;

<sup>1</sup> Archer and Odell disagree as to the apportionment of rôles. I follow the latter, who based his decision on play-bills. The logical conclusion would be that a star of Macready's magnitude would take the leading parts.

he was compelled to fill five engagements — not in the sense of “long runs”, but recalls, encores, returns because of popular clamor. On his fourth appearance, he gave new essayals — *Caius Gracchus*, *Othello*, *Cardinal Wolsey*, and *Rob Roy*. One night he appeared as *Virginius*, and Forrest another evening in the same part. Look on this picture and on that! Certainly it would be less than human if these two did not scan carefully the current prints to see what score was given to each of them. The ease with which the players of Macready’s day might add new rôles to each engagement, but old rôles in the sense that a part, once learned and proven acceptable, never paled in memory or staled in acting. As though what he had done was not enough, *Hamlet* was given. Why did not Forrest then come over from the Bowery and hiss its flippancy? “The Wonder”, “The Honeymoon”, and “The Stranger” were added to his growing list, and *Romeo!* Actors worked in those days, and so did stock companies. These latter had to be of merit, and were perforce kept limber in versatility: Simpson, Clarke, Foot, Woodhull, Jervis, Placide, Mrs. Hilson, Mrs. Stickney, Mrs. Sharpe, Mrs. Wheatley. Everywhere it was the same. Theatres maintained their prestige in this manner; in Philadelphia, in Boston, in Albany, in New Orleans, the “star” had only to indicate his repertory, and the company was ready for him when he arrived.

Undoubtedly Macready helped to improve the ill feeling caused by Kean’s recent visit; it was

probably one of the secrets of his cordial reception in Boston. Only in December, 1825, Kean's *Richard*, sorely crushed, had been driven from the stage of the Boston Theatre, where a scene of riot had occurred. Just as Macready later would have to flee for his life, so Kean now escaped the "mobocratic rowdies", to use Clapp's words. A fashionable audience, graced by the presence of Daniel Webster, greeted the new English star, Macready, in the spirit of conciliation. The actor had to fill two engagements in "The Athens of America." "Will you walk a little faster?" said a whiting to a snail." He had come close upon Forrest's first appearance in Boston, when he had given *Damon*, *William Tell*, *Sir Edward Mortimer*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Richard III*, *Rolla* — in all showing "glorious promise."

An incident occurred during Macready's stay in Philadelphia, under the management of Wemyss, that illustrates how a little flame might have led to a conflagration at that time. Writes Wemyss:

It was during the performance of "William Tell", a circumstance occurred which might have proved fatal to his future prospects in the United States. The property man (worthy old Charley Ward) had, through negligence, forgotten to provide an arrow to break before *Gesler*, in the fourth act of the play, compelling Macready to devote from his own quiver, one so loaded and poised, as to prevent the possibility of a failure in the most critical situation of the play. Not being one of the mildest tempered men, and irritated at the moment by the loss of, to him, a valuable stage property, he said in anger to the property

man, who was waiting to make his apology, “*I can’t get such an arrow in your country, sir!*” which was thus translated for him, “*I can’t get wood to make such an arrow in your country.*”

Letters flooded the newspaper editors’ offices denouncing the insult; Macready was taken aback. He called before him the company and made apology. The ripple was not enough to disturb a second engagement, when he gave his *Richard III* among other parts; “the worst representative of that character”, exclaims Wemyss, “I ever witnessed.”

Forrest’s next co-star experience was when Edmund Kean reached Albany to play “*Richard III*” on December 5, 1825. The great English tragedian was in the swirl of conflicting events, and was not in favor with the American people. In 1821, he had insulted the Boston public by refusing to play before a small audience, and in 1825 had become party in a disgraceful proceeding, whereby a London alderman had won a criminal suit against him, involving Madame Alderman. Insult on one hand was hard for Americans to bear, but immorality was worse! His tour of the States was an uproarious affair.

Against all expectations, however, the Albanians succumbed to the hypnotic force of the actor. According to Stone, people from the outlying districts flocked to the city as though on circus bent. Forrest was the *Richmond* of the evening. Through such tutelage, the American actor was drawing whatever education he could, and it was no mean educa-

tion to act within a few months under the direct observation of both Conway and Kean. He sought out the little man from London to get instructions, since he was to play seconds to Kean's rôles. He was given a rare glimpse of the actor in all his wildness, his unsteady genius. The room in which the interview took place had been a scene of wild debauch the night before. The *Othello* of all time was in his dressing gown; seated before a much stained piano, he sang for Forrest Tom Moore's "Farewell, but whenever you welcome the hour." From him Forrest caught the confidence of power, from him he obtained the freedom to do as he wanted with the rôle of *Iago*. To Forrest's mind it was genius recognizing genius, and when, later on in Philadelphia, at a public banquet, Kean said, "I have met one actor in this country, a young man named Edwin Forrest, who gave proofs of a decided genius for his profession, and will, I believe, rise to great eminence," the reverence for Kean was sealed forever in his heart.

The season in Albany under Gilfert suffered, and everybody with it in consequence. Forrest had appeared in such unusual parts as *Harvey Birch*, in a dramatization of Cooper's "The Spy" (done by Charles P. Clinch), and had supported Mrs. Barnes in "Isabella; or, The Fatal Marriage", playing *Bion*. Phelps records his *Macaire* in "The Forest of Bundy," and suggests his appearances in other melodramas with which Gilfert attempted to strengthen a sagging season. For his benefit,

the young actor played *Sir Edward Mortimer*, in "The Iron Chest", and *Robert Rafter* in "Too Late for Dinner." He also reverted to experiences of early days, and for the benefit of a fellow actor, clad as a harlequin, he recited Goldsmith's famous epilogue, as he had done in Philadelphia, and to give excitement to the endeavor, leaped through a blazing barrel, coming out safe but with badly singed eyebrows. Then, for a wager, he appeared at a circus benefit in a stilt-vaulting act. When, in May, the season was closed, Gilfert did not have sufficient money to pay his actors, so Forrest, leaving the city, put his theatre wardrobe in pawn as security for back board and rent. He did not stay in the hope of getting another engagement. Had he done so, he would have found the Pearl Street Theatre, now under the management of Henry Wallack, besides counting John Augustus Stone (the "eccentric old man" of the company), and Mrs. Stone among its members, had recruited from the South his old flame, Jane Placide!

Forrest's career may be said to have begun with the opening of the Bowery Theatre. But before then, it seemed that he had slipped backward, instead of going forward; for he was financially weaker, and there loomed no immediate prospect ahead of him. On May 16, 1826, he had played *Jaffier*, in Philadelphia, for the benefit of Charles S. Porter, and the papers had noted his maturity, his similarity to Conway, and his mental alertness. They prophesied that, with such a model and such wise

surety, his future was hopeful. Charles Durang had been in the audience, and this fact had afforded the young man an opportunity, for the benefit of Woodhull, to appear at the Park Theatre in New York as *Othello*. Durang had seen how deeply impressed were the Philadelphians, so much so that they had urged the young actor to appear another evening as *Rolla*. And he had told Woodhull that Forrest would be a great card for his benefit. Thus are ways made by a chance word in the theatre! The date was June 23, 1826. The *Mirror*, with fresh memories of Kean in the part, nevertheless recognized no servile copy in the new aspirant. "It is evident," they said, "that he looks to nature for models and to his own genius for instruction." They saw a remarkable enthusiasm, with no over-defined eccentricities, such as Forrest was later to show, and with a clear understanding of the text. They could detect only originality where others might see a pale reflection of Kean, so recently in New York.

Every one was eager to claim Forrest as his own discovery. Ludlow had had a hand in the making, and so had Caldwell; Gilfert had been his last regular manager, and now, in New York, awaiting the completion of the Bowery Theatre, he hugged the new metropolitan *Othello* and gave him money to get back his wardrobe in Albany. Those who were financially involved in the building of the Bowery Theatre had journeyed to Philadelphia to see him — his friend Prosper M. Wetmore among them, — and

they had left it to Gilfert to bargain with the new recruit for a salary of twenty-eight dollars per week. Now that the classic Park had hailed him, Gilfert quailed in his shoes for fear that he had underestimated the young man.

Forrest was having his first quaff of success. His brother William was taking a benefit in Washington, and for it Forrest appeared as *Rolla*, in "Pizarro", and then for six nights he went as "star" to Baltimore. Rees records that on July 5, 1826, he followed Edmund Kean at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, giving *Othello*. Then he paused, awaiting the opening of the Bowery. His state of poverty was over, for he had accumulated enough money in these few weeks to bear four hundred dollars of it in triumph to his mother.

There had been a tendency to put upon Forrest the incubus of praise bestowed upon the prodigy. "Master Forrest" in younger days had conjured to mind Master Betty and Master Payne. But now he was emerging into young manhood, and those flamboyant traits of character, which intensified in later years, were becoming marked in him. Alger gives a lurid picture of his being drawn to the gaming table in New Orleans days, and one night, having won everything, of his pitching the cards in the fire, tossing the filthy money on the floor, and stalking from the room, uttering curses upon the direful habit. In similar manner, he is said to have repudiated the habit of promiscuous drinking. Though famed for his herculean strength, it is to be noted that as a

## THE EAGLE AWAKENS

young man (like the "strenuous" Roosevelt) he was far from strong; and so his interest in physical exercise was, during this period, awakened for a purpose. He went systematically through the routine of military drill, of horsemanship, of fencing, and took boxing lessons from one George Hernizer, whom Alger describes as a "professor of the manly art." He was making of himself an instrument which actors were to fear when they played opposite him in violent scenes.

Forrest's name, at the very beginning of his career, was associated with the two outstanding theatres of New York — the Park and the Bowery, names synonymous with the words *aristocratic* and *democratic*. The latter disavowed any antagonistic policy to the former, but the clientele which gathered there was lustier, its palate demanded a hardier food, and the variety of its offerings was now strongly colored. Their trump card at the very outset was Forrest; on their stage, he spread his wings and became renowned, reaching the top with unprecedented strides. Though the Bowery Theatre was burned down many times, it rose upon its ashes over and over again with meteoric rapidity; but even if each time improvements were made in structure and machinery, the spirit of the theatre remained the same. It is safe, therefore, from contemporary records, to present a composite picture of these two distinctive theatres. We will take for granted the great gap in structure between the Revolutionary crudeness of the old John Street Theatre, and the

new Bowery, with its imitation marble, its ample portico, its columns and decorations, sporting, instead of candle dips on a barrel hoop, the new gas confined within ground glass.

The yearly history of the Park Theatre is told in many records, none more vivid or more accurate than is contained in Doctor Odell's ample "Annals of the New York Stage." It is merely my purpose here to suggest the spirit which the house represented, and the human element which flowed through it. The feeling people had for "the play" was one of intimate interest in the policy of the manager; there was more of a social bond existing between the individuals in the theatre than there is to-day, partly because the town was smaller, but largely because the players created personal feelings of loyalty which made them conscious, when they appealed to the public at the time of their benefits, that their drawing power was measured by the support of a definite clientele. Doors opened at six-thirty or seven, and crowds, even at that hour, usually blocked the entrance. Mad scrambles for the pit door often resulted in torn coats and bruised heads, and into this pit came, according to Gabriel Harrison, the better class of men, the galleries holding the roughs. It was not always a sober audience, for the "bloods" of the town arrived direct from restaurants where "delicious drinks" were freely circulated, and theatres themselves began to profit by spacious saloons and lengthy bars of their own. The pit was filled with wooden benches, leaden colored,

and the pittites would often stand up and gaze unabashed at the well-to-do holders of boxes.

The men, generally, wore their hats [writes Joe Cowell, in 1821], at all events, they consulted only their own opinion and comfort in the matter; and the ladies, I observed, very sensibly all came in bonnets, but usually dispossessed themselves of them, and tied them in large bunches, high up to the gold columns; and as there is nothing a woman can touch that she does not instinctively adorn, the varied colours of the ribands and materials of which they were made, were in my opinion a vast improvement to the unfurnished appearance of the house.

Manners in the theatre were rather plebeian in those days, only a little exaggerated by Washington Irving (Jonathan Oldstyle) in his comic picture of the dramatic critic of 1802, inquisitive, staring, and indifferent to the play.

And who were those frequenting the boxes? Garrison recalls them, — the best intellects of the nation :

Sometimes a Webster or a Clay; lawyers — Ogden, Hoffman, Colden; doctors — Francis, Hosack, Nelson, Bayley, McDonald; the poets of the day — Irving, Halleck, Bryant, Willis, Morris, Prosper M. Wetmore; editors — M. M. Noah, Webb, Lock, Bun, Clark; artists — Trumbull, Vanderlin, Dunlap, Morse, Inman, Smith, Ingham, Cole, Durand; the wealthy — John Jacob Astor, Duncan C. Pell and others.

It was a gaudy place, this Park Theatre, with much gold, medallions, and flowers, with Doric columns and fawn coloring; and, to cap it all, a

drop scene wherein, amidst painted damask curtains, a statue of Washington stood out against a vista of the Hudson River. The reticence of the Park management prohibited advertising on this curtain! But, with all its flimsiness, the Park recalled gala days, — when Henry Placide, Kean, Hackett, Macready, Clara Fisher, Louisa Lane, J. W. Wallack, Charles Kean, Charles Mathews, Madame Vestris, Tyrone Power, Fanny Kemble, Ellen Tree, and others graced its boards. Those were the days when, along Broadway, rattled omnibuses, and Canal Street was a fashionable shopping centre for what Fanny Kemble dubbed the extravagant American women. "They never walk in the streets," her "Journal" records, "but in the most showy and extreme toilette, and I have known twenty, forty, and sixty dollars paid for a bonnet to wear in a morning saunter up Broadway." The parvenuism of Mrs. Mowatt's "Fashion" might have been pictured by Miss Kemble instead of Mrs. Mowatt! The social cheapness of our theatres strengthened with the years and helped to deteriorate manners. The grills of the playhouse appeared in the early nineteenth century. Even so prejudiced a centre as Providence, Rhode Island, set against the iniquities of the actor, allowed wines and sherbet and negus to be passed around to the powdered dames in the boxes. A small bar or refectory was a necessary adjunct to the theatre. Gaisford, in his "History of the Theatre in New Orleans", and Harby, writing of conditions in Charleston, South Caro-

lina, both hail the drama as a healthy attraction to keep the young men of the town away from card playing and drink. But, in Forrest's day, the bar loomed ominous. The Pearl Street Theatre, which he had just left, boasted a spacious refreshment room, a ladies' boudoir, and a "punch room", so called. Niblo's Garden and Theatre, in 1828, catered to the appetites in many directions, and Forrest was to be a familiar figure on Billy Niblo's stage. In these gardens, there may have been temples erected to music, whose strains, together with the colored lights amidst artificial shrubbery and trees, gave the New Yorker a foreign thrill. But the counter, dedicated to Bacchus, regaled the audience between acts, and brought to the fore the "talented drunkard" of the stage itself, who told loudly of the glories of the theatre in his boyhood, while he drank copiously of brandy and strong ale. The taverns and coffeehouses outside, the bar situated in the upper circle, the "Oriental rooms" built to compete with the "Oriental corner saloon", were a distinct part of the theatregoing of the day.

But the Bowery and the Park, in 1826, were considered high class. By 1845, the Park was threatened with immoral conditions, the approaches to different parts of the house being infested with "solicitors." And soon the Bowery Theatre was to fall into the hands of the "butcher b'hoys", who raised bedlam on Saturday nights. Now, however, these two houses were watched intently, because the competitive theatrical system was born of a close

race for public patronage which took place as soon as the Bowery Theatre was launched.

Forrest did not take part in the opening of the new Bowery Theatre, on October 23, 1826, but he was to read the dedicatory poem for the second Bowery — erected Phoenix-like upon the fiery ruins of the first — which his dear friend Leggett had written. In those days, flames never quelled the vigor of theatrical energy. It took from May 26, 1828, to August 20, to erect a gaudier house covered with the then unusual stucco, and ablaze with gas. These rapid building flights will be found detailed in Odell. As we write now, the last of the Bowery theatres has gone up in flames, nor does the ghost of old Bowery days mean much to the present generation. For the glory of this theatre was long ago buried, and in its place, and on its stage, appeared a Yiddish drama, for a far different audience than that which used to flock so eagerly to see Forrest.

Those past days were rare and picturesque. Horace Greeley lauds the memory of them, when he went to the theatre in 1831, and Greeley was not too ardent a theatregoer. To him the stage had lost its powerful allegiance to liberty “by its habitual leaning to the side of Slavery, Tippling, and other iniquities, whereby some men derive profit from others’ weaknesses.” Walt Whitman had been a frequenter of the Park Theatre in his early years, but it is of the Bowery that he writes with greatest gusto in “November Boughs.” It was there that he first saw Forrest in Payne’s “Brutus”, “and

it affected me for weeks; or rather, I might say, permanently filter'd into my whole nature." Whitman's is a contemporary record of what the Bowery Theatre meant to the people of that generation, and no better portrait than his can be found of its human value. He wrote:

Certainly the main "reason for being" of the Bowery Theatre those years was to furnish the public with Forrest's and Booth's performances — the latter having a popularity and circles of enthusiastic admirers and critics fully equal to the former — though people were divided as always. For some reason or other, neither Forrest nor Booth would accept engagements at the more fashionable theatre, the Park. And it is a curious reminiscence, but a true one, that both these great actors and their performances were taboo'd by "polite society" in New York and Boston at the time — probably as being too robustious. But no such scruples affected the Bowery. . . .

Recalling from that period the occasion of either Forrest or Booth, any good night at the old Bowery, packed from ceiling to pit with its audience mainly of alert, well-dress'd, full-blooded young and middle-aged men, the best average of American-born mechanics — the emotional nature of the whole mass arous'd by the power and magnetism of as mighty mimes as ever trod the stage — the whole crowded auditorium, and what seeth'd in it, and flash'd from its faces and eyes, to me as much a part of the show as any — bursting forth in one of those long-kept-up tempests of handclapping peculiar to the Bowery — no dainty kid-glove business, but electric force and muscle from perhaps two thousand full-sinew'd men — (the inimitable and chromatic tempest of one of those ovations

to Edwin Forrest, welcoming him back after an absence, comes up to me this moment) — such sounds and scenes as here resumed will surely afford to many old New Yorkers some fruitful recollections. . . .

I can yet remember (for I always scann'd an audience as rigidly as a play) the faces of the leading authors, poets, editors, of those times — Fenimore Cooper, Bryant, Paulding, Irving, Charles King, Watson Webb, N. P. Willis, Hoffman, Halleck, Mumford, Morris, Leggett, L. G. Clarke, R. A. Locke, and others, occasionally peering from the first tier boxes; and even the great National Eminences, Presidents Adams, Jackson, Van Buren, and Tyler. . . .

Those were in the palmy days of the Bowery, but even in the next period, graphically recalled by Whitman, Forrest, the idol, remained steadfast.

A while after 1840, the character of the Bowery, as hitherto described, completely changed. Cheap prices and vulgar programmes came in. People who in after years saw the pandemonium of the pit and the doings on the boards must not gauge by them the times and characters I am describing. Not but what there was more or less rankness in the crowd even then. For types of sectional New York those days — the streets East of the Bowery, that intersect Division, Grand, and up to Third Avenue — types that never found their Dickens, or Hogarth, or Balzac, and have pass'd away unportraitured — the young ship-builders, cartmen, butchers, firemen (the old-time "soap-lock" or exaggerated "Mose" or "Sikesey" of Chanfrau's plays), they, too, were always to be seen in these audiences, racy of the East River and the Dry Dock. Slang, wit, occasional shirt sleeves, and

a picturesque freedom of looks and manners, with a rude, good-natured and restless movement, were generally noticeable. Yet there never were audiences that paid a good actor or an interesting play the compliment of more sustain'd attention, or quicker rapport.

The night of November 6, 1826, fairly launched Forrest on his career. The eagle had discovered himself. He repeated the rôle of *Othello*, so favorably received in the single performance at the Park, and, voluntarily, the stockholders met him afterwards in the committee room and agreed unanimously that his salary should be raised to forty dollars weekly. Again a lurking fear beset them that their new attraction would be bribed away from them. Such a scheme, indeed, was tried, but Forrest — to his credit be it said — turned it aside with deprecatory gesture, holding to his agreement with Gilfert. This manager put him forward rapidly in leading rôles, supported by Duff, Barrett, Roberts, Mrs. Barrett, and Mrs. Hughes. *Damon*, *Jaffier*, and *William Tell* followed *Othello*. Bravely Gilfert faced a discouraging situation; his young star was adding to his repertory such parts as *Osmond* in "The Castle Spectre", *Carwin*, *King Lear*, *Sir Edward Mortimer*, *Octavian*, and *Richard III*; his season was enriched by the appearance of Conway, Mrs. Duff, and Thomas S. Hamblin. Against such attractions, the Park Theatre offered Macready. The casts enumerated by Doctor Odell, in his lively review of the Bowery Theatre, carry much weight. For instance, on December 1, Forrest played *Mark*

*Antony* to the *Brutus* of Conway, the *Cassius* of Barrett, the *Portia* of Mrs. Young, and the *Calpurnia* of Mrs. Hughes. On December 18, Forrest's *Jaffier* was supported by the *Pierre* of Hamblin and the *Belvidera* of Mrs. Duff; his *Lear* by the *Edgar* of Hamblin and the *Cordelia* of Mrs. Duff (on December 27). Perhaps John Augustus Stone had an opportunity of studying his capacity as an Indian when, on Evacuation Day, Forrest was the *Chief* in "She Would be a Soldier", by M. M. Noah, and of building on this when he wrote "Metamora." I am beholden to Doctor Odell's indefatigable researches for the curious discovery that William Leggett played *Bertram* disastrously at the Bowery, on November 18, and thereafter disappeared from stage annals, having once before, in 1819, so says Ireland, desecrated the boards. Was it due to Forrest's wrong encouragement or to a desire to be near his friend in daily intercourse?

During the ordeal of these metropolitan appearances, Forrest was besieged with disquieting illness. He wrote his mother on December 3, 1826:

Most Beloved Mother,—The reason I have not answered your letter is a serious indisposition under which I have been laboring for some time. But, thanks be to the Eternal (only for your sake and my dear sisters'), I am now convalescent. You will ask, no doubt, why it is only for your sake that I thank the Eternal. Because were you separated forever from me, existence would have no longer an attraction. Again, you will wonder what has made me tired of life, especially now that I am on the

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full tide of prosperity. Alas! I know not how soon sickness may render me incapable of the labors of my profession; and then, penury, perchance the poor-house, may ensue. I shudder to think of it. Yet the terrible reflection haunts me in spite of myself; and were it not for you and the girls, I should not shrink to try the unsearchable depths of Eternity. But no more of this gloomy subject.

Dining last Sunday with Major Moses, when the cloth was removed, as I was preparing to take a glass of wine, I felt a pain in my right breast, which rapidly increased to such a degree that I told the Major, who sat next to me, of the singular sensation. I had no sooner spoken than the pain shot to my heart and I fell upon the floor. For the space of fifteen minutes I lay perfectly speechless. When, through the kind attentions of the family (which I can never forget), I had in a measure recovered, the pain was still very violent. A physician was summoned, who bled me copiously, and thus relieved my sufferings. In consequence of my weakened and distressed condition, I was persuaded to stay there all night. The next morning I returned to my lodgings, and remained indoors all day, though feeling perfectly recovered. But the following evening, very injudiciously, I performed *Damon*. The exertion in this arduous part caused a relapse, which, however, was not seriously felt until Thursday evening, when I was performing *William Tell*. Then, indeed, it was agony. All that I had suffered before was but the shadow of a shade to what I then felt,—pains in all my limbs, and my head nigh to bursting. With the unavoidable use of brandy, ether, and hartshorn, I got wildly through the character. Since that time I have had medical attendance, and every attention that kindness can show. . . .

The romantic young man, on the first lap of the highway of success, romantically faces the idea of death and places emphasis on his own importance. He had some cause to feel how dependent was his family on the maintenance of his good fortune, but he had been too little upon the road to success to count it the full tide of prosperity. Sentimentally he dwelt upon the ideas of death. Overconfident, he deplored his possible loss, though willing to face the great adventure. About the same time, a young Bowdoin graduate, Nathaniel Hawthorne (July 14, 1825), who faced his future, with much less to show than Forrest, but with a preternatural doubt and a retiring modesty in his soul, wrote:

The family had before conceived much too high an opinion of my talents, and had probably formed expectations which I shall never realize. I have thought much upon the subject, and have finally come to the conclusion that I shall never make a distinguished figure in the world.

Forrest's illness passed away with no other recurrence, and the season saw him in greater and greater demand. Gilfert allowed him, now and again, to go to other theatres for an engagement, himself setting the terms, which were two hundred dollars a night. In this way, he was able to travel to Boston, Providence, and Buffalo. The disparity between his regular salary and the rental price put upon him for outsiders seems to have incensed the young man, for, when Gilfert later made arrangements with him for the next season, he asked For-

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rest his terms. "You yourself have fixed them," he replied pointedly. And so his new contract called for eighty performances at two hundred dollars a night! From twenty-eight dollars a week, within a year, the curve of values shot upward, and Forrest started on the road to fortune.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MUNIFICENT PRIZE GIVER

Forrest always heralded his intentions in pompous fashion; he always took into his confidence the public which was giving him such generous support; he always courted praise as a benefactor. He had just turned the ripe age of twenty-three when he reached a momentous decision. Power was concentrating in his hands, and he wished to show its beneficent influence. His salary had taken a leap from forty dollars a week to four hundred, and he had accumulated sufficient funds in the preceding two years to move his family to a house in Philadelphia, where they might not be forced to struggle as they had been accustomed to. "I fear," he wrote to his mother, "you could not be prevailed on to come to New York. And indeed I do not wonder; for, besides the numerous circle of friends you have, it is there that the sacred ashes of my father lie." Nor was there any effort on his own part to turn his back on Philadelphia. All his life his interests were centred there.

Freed of debt, and with his family thus secure, he now went afield to encourage talent. This may have been prompted by a desire to aid American

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authorship, but it was largely born of a realization that rôles such as his ability might compass were not easily procurable, there not being many a Sheridan Knowles on the horizon. His various offers of prizes, according to Alger, elicited two hundred manuscripts from which, with some difficulty and doubt, the judges, chosen by him, selected nine; and of these, three were discarded as not suitable. In fact, it is clearly to be seen that the plays that were accepted had to be changed, and several of them re-written before they came within the scope of the actor.

As a result of his munificence, many friendships were made, but Forrest's fulsome championship of his authors, his vigorous announcement of their merits, his own earnest endeavor to make the most of the parts, could not disguise the fact that, whereas the author might obtain a certain share of publicity in the matter, in the long course of the successful runs of several of the pieces, the financial returns to the authors were more than niggardly,—they were unjust. In the flush of preparation, Forrest would often make promises as to benefits accruing to the authors which never materialized and which he never strove to make good. In the case of Robert Montgomery Bird, the situation came to open rupture, where Forrest's astuteness overcame strict justice, and where the secret motives of the donor became self-evident.

Forrest offered aid to the American dramatist at a time when there was everywhere a consciousness of the domination of British influence in our

theatre. The lack of any copyright restrictions made it less risky for the manager to import his plays; besides which there was a prejudice against the home product, however worthy it might be of success. J. N. Barker had disguised his Philadelphia origin, when he dramatized Scott's "Marmion", courting identification with the London theatre. There was very little incentive to do the native thing. Plays were dashed off to suit the utilitarian need. Richard Penn Smith took an order to send piecemeal to the theatre the pages of his "The Eighth of January" (1829), commemorating the Battle of New Orleans; J. L. Jones wrote "Moll Pitcher" (1839) in two or three days. And when a group of actors decided, by means of prizes, to give encouragement to the American drama, they were in reality only seeking to be catered to themselves, demanding a series of situations around a character offering opportunities to their own individual abilities. While Wallack, in 1836, made appeal to native dramatic authors, and while he emphasized that his prize of one thousand dollars would go to some one who chose an American subject, we have no record that the demand was met even by any attempt to fulfill the requirements. In reality, he accepted N. P. Willis's "Tortesa, the Usurer", which was the kind of romantic picturesqueness most pleasing and adaptable to Wallack's nature; besides which, he was too English to care particularly what the results might be. Verplanck and Washington Irving picked Samuel Woodworth's "The Foundling

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of the Sea", not as a drama worthy the prize offered by Yankee Hill, but as a possible outlet for Hill's Yankee delineations. We know, in 1830, that James H. Hackett was jealous of his own Yankee stage excellence, and Paulding's "The Lion of the West" was shaped, not in accord with the prize condition that it should be "an original comedy whereof an American should be the leading character", but to fit Hackett. The years when Forrest stepped forward as the good Samaritan of the American drama saw the light also of such prize plays as James H. Kennicott's "Irma; or, The Prediction" (1830), and Caroline Lee Hentz's "De Lara; or, The Moorish Bride" (1831).

Alger declares that "in one way and another, first and last, Forrest paid out from his private purse for the encouragement of a native dramatic literature as much as twenty thousand dollars in premiums, benefits, and gratuities to several of the unfortunate authors." This is not much when you consider what "Metamora", "The Gladiator", and "Jack Cade" alone netted him. He might have, in the tragic case of John Augustus Stone, a sentimental pang, and might make a grand gesture in raising a tombstone over that dramatist's untimely grave. But he was willing to sacrifice the good friendship of Bird for an inexorable control, not only of all the emoluments coming from his plays, but of the manuscripts themselves, which he continued to hold until his death, when there was no one to have legal claim upon them.

Through a paper owned and edited by Leggett, the *Critic*, November 22, 1828, Forrest made his first announcement of a prize; he confessed that the country must be rich in native talent and that he believed it awaited such encouragement as his to come forth into the open. "To the author of the best Tragedy, in five acts," he announced, "of which the hero or principal character shall be an aboriginal of this country, the sum of five hundred dollars, and half of the proceeds of the third representation, with my own gratuitous services on that occasion. The award to be made by a committee of literary and theatrical gentlemen." So went forth the magnanimous manifesto. The only explanation that can be offered as to the dense business dealings between the actor and his authors was that the state of American letters was such as to make it a source of thankfulness whenever a native play saw an easy road to presentation. John P. Kennedy, Cornelius Mathews, Barker, and others were all confessing the low state of the drama, where the managers' attitudes and the absence of copyright laws were both inimical to the development of a native drama on our stage. Where was that protective tariff, Mathews exclaimed, which would guard a literary work as zealously as it does ploughshares?

A group of Philadelphians rose to the call; they studied Forrest as a sculptor scrutinizes a subject; they even wrote, as was evidenced by Bird, under his direction, and breathed into their lines sentiments which would instill in him the fervor of con-

viction because they were his thoughts too on the subject. When one reads the speeches that predominate in "Jack Cade", one understands that it was compounded of the eloquence of Forrest, that it smacked of his style. Letters, among many, was an avocation, not a profession, and the Gentleman of the Old Régime felt he was conferring a favor on the theatre craft, whenever he took time from his law or his medicine to turn out a story or to concoct hastily a play, based on some model to be found in his library. He was usually grounded in the classics, and his subjects must be foreign rather than native. David Paul Brown, a Philadelphian, who did not come under the "munificent" hand of Forrest, believed that the stage had more to gain in dignity from his association with it than had he to gain by the trouble it exacted of him. The literary man was high-handed in his conduct with managers. Yet they all knew that there was a prejudice against the American playwright, and so Forrest's encouragement appeared more of a real gesture than it was, because there was so little of this generous incentive being given.

It was during this period of Forrest's career, therefore, that the prize plays were accepted by him and almost immediately produced. They were as follows:

1. "Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags." By John Augustus Stone. Park Theatre, December 15, 1829. Arch Street Theatre, January 23, 1830.

2. "Caius Marius." By Richard Penn Smith. Arch Street Theatre, January 12, 1831.
3. "Pelopidas; or, The Fall of the Polemarchs." Accepted but not played by Forrest.
4. "The Gladiator." By Robert Montgomery Bird. Park Theatre, September 26, 1831.
5. "Oralloossa, Son of the Incas." By Robert Montgomery Bird. Arch Street Theatre, October 10, 1832.
6. "The Ancient Briton." By John Augustus Stone. Arch Street Theatre, March 27, 1833.
7. "The Broker of Bogota." By Robert Montgomery Bird. Bowery Theatre, February 12, 1834.
8. "Jack Cade." By Robert T. Conrad. First produced by the actor, Addams, as "Aylmere", Walnut Street Theatre, December 9, 1835, and afterwards by Forrest as "Jack Cade", Park Theatre, May 24, 1841.
9. "Mohammed, the Arabian Prophet." By G. H. Miles. Produced on October 27, 1851, in New York, but not by Forrest.

These prize plays were all of the same tragic and romantic magnitude: they aimed for picturesque effectiveness of attitude, for well-rounded utterance of high-flown sentiments; they instilled the precepts of patriotic love of country and awakened a sympathy for the nobility of the oppressed. Forrest was tyrannic guardian over these plays, and,

because of this, "Metamora" and "Caius Marius" can only be read in fragments. But the character of such plays is easily determined by reading a few lines; their rhythm is familiar, their imagery stilted, and one meets in them many reminiscences of Shakespeare — many echoes of the Shakespearean line. An intensity of utterance was required in the delivery of such speeches as are here to be found, and Forrest possessed the requisite robust vigor. These dramatists of Philadelphia catered to the classic style, just as Willis, in "Tortesa", satisfied the romantic grace of the elder Wallack.

There was something simple yet massive about such rôles as best suited Forrest; he delighted in moments of oratorical aloofness, where everything gave way before the grand address. Nature was laid on thick; psychological response to visions seen, to violent situations, to homely memories, was deep-dyed in emotion.

Durang calls attention to the fact that Forrest's style was not considered by every one as legitimate; there were advocates of "chaste acting" which had "no rant in the impassioned passages, no startling attitudes, with a pause and gaze to elicit the thundering applause"; rather would such champions "have the player the mere reciter, or, rather, the reader behind the table in the sitting posture."

The playwright of the day who ignored the formula was doomed to failure. *Rolla*, *Tell*, *Damon*, *Brutus*, *Virginius* — all bore the same cast of nobility. Kotzebue, Sheridan Knowles, John Howard

Payne were of the same school. It was necessary that the Philadelphia technique be shaped in this mold. The acting of the day was recognized fully in such parts. These were the characters, outside of Shakespeare, in which Forrest climbed to high position. The public judged him in them by the memory of others in the same rôles. Cooper, Conway, Kean were the standard-bearers. Forrest did not really want an *American Drama*; only the savage could give the primitive nobility to which he was accustomed! He wanted the *forensic* pose. This might not absorb those who looked for subtle art, but it would hold—and did hold—the masses. Forrest wanted character of a combative nature, which admitted of the grace of taut body, and the music of conflicting emotion—sarcasm, pride, hate, love, inspiration, ecstasy. “*Metamora*” was teeming with these qualities. Besides which, it had what, in Forrest, was a consuming passion,—a realization of the prime greatness of his country in contrast with the littleness brought upon it by the white man’s machinations. This *Metamora*, supposed to have been modelled after the King Philip who was son of Massasoit, was actually taken, so Bird accused, from a play of his own entitled “King Philip; or, The Sagamore.” It gave Forrest an opportunity to stand forth as a gorgeous figure of the red man, whom he had loved in *Push-ma-ta-ha*, and he conjured into being all he had seen during his sojourn among the Louisiana Indians. In one place, *Metamora* says to his wife, *Nahmeokee*, “My

heart is big with thoughts.” The secret power of such dialogue was that the heart must well over in floods of emotion. It was all a grand pose, and gained effect, if the actor himself had power to steep the senses of the spectator in swelling sound. The picturesque manner: “Metamora cannot lie”, “Men of the pale race, beware!”, “Dost thou come here with a lie in thy heart to witness against me?”, “Bring me thy little one, that I may press him to my burning heart”: it is like a series of exercises in emotion, the gamut of which Forrest could so easily run through. We have in “Metamora” epic material without a spark of creative imagination, a succession of poses: the pose tender, when the chieftain finds his baby slain; the pose defiant, when he is captured; the pose pathetic, when he is fired upon to his death; the pose triumphant, as he breathes his last.

“The Gladiator” is equally as expressive of Forrest’s taste for colorful emotion. It plays upon all the sympathies which he loved to depict: the insurgent figure alone, subject to humiliation, giving way before necessity, notwithstanding because of high-minded affection, rebellious to the point of combat, and dying in statuesque lines. “Jack Cade” is of the same proportion, and in the person of *Aylmere* Forrest was able to breathe forth such thoughts as these, always in his mind, often iterated in his correspondence, often expressed in his conversation and addresses, and now, as though by dictation, set down by Conrad:

### THE FABULOUS FORREST

Liberty gives nor light nor heat itself;  
It but permits us to be good and happy.  
It is to man what space is to the orbs,  
The medium where he may revolve and shine,  
Or, darkened by his vices, fall forever.

And when the constantly turbulent spirit of Forrest is understood, it is easy to conjecture what satisfaction it gave him to point his speech, as the story-teller does a moral, at his audience, so often consisting of those who cast upon him wrongly, as he thought, the weight of their censure.

. . . Every rank, — the lowest, — hath its height  
To which hearts flutter, with as large a hope  
As princes feel for empire! But in each,  
Ambition struggles with a sea of hate.  
He who toils up the ridgy grades of life,  
Finds, in each station, icy scorn above,  
Below him hooting envy.

Forrest took it upon himself to believe that he had invited his “prize” dramatists to the service of the theatre for the first time. So he proclaimed it on all occasions. But such was far from the truth. Stone had written a number of plays before “Metamora”; Richard Penn Smith was known to the Philadelphia stage through several comedies, historical dramas, and melodramas, before “Caius Marius”; Bird’s interest in the theatre had actually begun while he was still a medical student and antedated “The Gladiator” and “Oralloossa”; Conrad had already catered to one actor before he was solicited to cater to Forrest. On the other hand, Miles can



#### FORREST AS METAMORA

*"The pathos with which Forrest rendered portions of the play . . . was one of its most remarkable excellences and one of his most distinctive trophies as a dramatic artist."*

— W. R. ALGER



hardly be counted in the group because he was neither a Philadelphian nor did his "Mohammed" actually win a prize, though Forrest sent him the money in lieu of no better play to be found. Forrest's services to the drama therefore have been overestimated.

Of them all, however, he found Bird the most promising and the most hopeful writer. Suicide removed Stone, who drowned himself in the Schuylkill River, and Forrest erected over him a monument properly inscribed. Did he dramatize to himself the idea of Kean's stone erected over the grave of George Frederick Cooke in New York? But, with Conrad and Smith and Bird, there is a correspondence to show how much of a collaboration went on, after the prizes were awarded, how definitely the actor schemed to knit each drama to his requirements. He was autocratic in his instructions and enthusiastic in his prophecies. Act by act, scene by scene, speech by speech, Forrest analyzed these plays from the standpoint of their personal effectiveness, and then, with unfailing enthusiasm, would add the word of encouragement. To Smith (October 7, 1830) he is reassuring after revision on the script of "Caius Marius." "I have increasing pride for the tragedy," he declared. "It is destined to make a great hit. We must take our time, however, to produce it, giving all the proper preliminaries, such as rehearsal, costume, and the newspaper mention by implication, tho' the latter, if it was not the *fashion*, there would in my mind be no necessity; its own merit can stand the hazard." And as a

side light on the stock way of preparing a piece for production in this year, 1830, Forrest adds, "I will have the parts of 'Marius' copied for Boston, New York, and Philadelphia."

The natural vehemence of the man in denoting his convictions took expression often in suggestive language. What did Forrest write to Bird, after the opening of "The Broker of Bogota" at the Bowery Theatre, on February 12, 1834?

"Your tragedy was performed and crowned with entire success. *The Broker of Bogota* will live when our vile trunks are rotten."

It was the very night of the first production that this prophecy was made. Forrest and Wetmore were clamoring for Bird. Forrest was summoning him. "All your friends will be rejoiced to see you — you shall be welcomed with hearts and hands." Yet, three years after, it was Bird who was summoning Forrest to his home and asking for an accounting of all the work done for him. And, not getting a satisfactory explanation of the business which existed between them, Bird had indignantly opened the door to Forrest, exclaiming, "That scoundrel! He is not fit to be in the presence of a lady!" Evidently words had been spoken in the presence of the playwright's wife!

Strange anomaly this, of Forrest always on the edge of happiness, of friendship, yet quickly precipitated, through his own unwisdom, into disappointment and open discord.

Bird wrote four plays for Forrest, and the financial

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arrangements for these, and for the task of revising "Metamora" to be used abroad, were of the most ambiguous character.

Forrest's sense of the dramatic was partly based on instinct and partly on the workableness of the dialogue in production. He read a manuscript with its externalization in mind. If it did not materialize pictorially in his imagination, which was panoramic rather than subtle, he gave up any idea of producing it. It was in this spirit he wrote to John Howard Payne, returning him the script of his play, "Romulus."

It has in my opinion too much narrative, and is much too declamatory to be effective on the stage. The wrestling scene and several others afford excellent opportunities for spectacle, but *I* doubt if they would command sufficient interest to repay their "getting up." . . . *I* need not tell you that the action of passion is the secret of dramatic writing.

Such views as these he held in his work with Doctor Bird. When these dramatists wrote a play for him, they had to abide by his dictates.

It would seem that Bird was willing to subject himself to these restrictions, and for a while a close relationship sprang up between himself and Forrest; so close, indeed, that they planned a trip together through the South, and even down into Spanish American country, in search of dramatic material. Bird kept a diary of his wanderings, and there are extant letters of introduction to certain influential Mexicans, soliciting aid in his researches. Forrest

seems suddenly to have left his companion in Charleston, hastening to New Orleans to fulfill an engagement. This was the spring of 1833, and Bird continued his travels alone, going as far south as Montgomery, Alabama, and Columbus, Georgia, and gathering data for a book of "Sketches of America", never published. Only manuscript records indicate the scope of the book. Cholera caused him to cut short any further wanderings.

The breach between Bird and Forrest was due largely to financial dealings. When the Doctor first began writing for Forrest, he understood that, if his first play was a success, he would receive three thousand dollars for it; and a percentage was also mentioned. For his four plays, he received only three thousand dollars, since of the four "*Pelopidas*" was replaced by "*The Gladiator*." Bird had borrowed two thousand dollars from Forrest, giving him notes, and when the actor later tried to collect, he informed Bird that no more money would be paid him for the plays, no matter what their success. This was a great surprise to Bird, who had done some additional work on "*Metamora*" for him, it being agreed that for such revision he was to be paid two thousand dollars. It would seem that a "gentleman's agreement" alone existed between the two, but it was firmly implanted in Forrest's mind that the one thousand dollars paid Bird three times for "prize plays" not only absolved him from further financial obligation, but gave him possession of the manuscripts as his own property. Bird's claim was

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that the three plays were successful, and hence, according to agreement, for these he should have had nine thousand dollars, instead of which he had only been paid the three awards. Since this was the condition, of eleven thousand dollars due him, only five thousand had actually been paid. Bird's ledger thus accounts for the six thousand dollars still due him :

Dr.	Cr.
To "The Gladiator." \$ 3,000.00	Received on "The Gladiator." \$1,000.00
— "Oralloossa." 3,000.00	On "Oralloossa." 1,000.00
— "Broker of Bogota." 3,000.00	On "Broker of B." 1,000.00
— rewriting	On loan. 2,000.00
"Metamora." 2,000.00	
	\$5,000.00
	\$11,000.00
	5,000.00
	\$ 6,000.00

Declared Bird, "He owes me, therefore, \$6,000.00 ; though I have no bond, contract, or other written instrument to show that he does."

Through Bird's plays, Forrest was adding greatly to his own income, and naturally the playwright thought he should share in the success. To satisfy himself on this score, he wrote a rough manuscript, entitled "Dramatic Authors and their Profits", very apt and illuminating at this moment in the life of Forrest. He argued thus :

In London, a play that runs 20 nights is considered highly successful, and worth (a 5-act one) £1,000 sterling to the author, who is paid by the manager, this or any other sum agreed upon between them, or derives his profits according to the old system of *third nights*. On

this system, the 3rd, 6th, and 9th nights were always the author's; and, after the 9th night, he had also an interest, though of a kind that varied in different cases, according to the previous agreement.

These are the profits in *a single theatre*. The author can now, under the Bulwer Law (by keeping his piece in MS), carry it to the remaining theatres, where he is also paid.

Among *all* the theatres, a perfectly successful 5-act play may be considered worth £1,500, at least.

Morton received £1,000 apiece for his comedies; Reynolds even more, as he admitted he had made by his comedies more than £21,000 sterling.

*My* plays Forrest has always performed, at the first gettings-up, in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, 5 successive nights in each place; and, in second engagements in these towns, so many times more as to be equal (counted with the getting-up engagements) to 25 or 30 nights in all. And these nights were more profitable than a run of that length *in any one theatre* could have been, as they insured so many more *crams* [sic]. Forrest gets in these (and other) places, for the *first* night, in each, *half the gross receipts*; and, for the 4 remaining nights, *half the profits*. The first night in New York is worth (and Forrest has received much *more* than) \$700; in Philadelphia and Boston, it is worth from \$500 to \$600. In these three towns, for these first nights, he receives, say, \$1,800. The remaining 4 nights are worth ( $\frac{1}{2}$  the profits) \$300 each,—in all \$3,600; to which add the first nights, \$1,800 = \$5,400 for the first engagements in these towns. In the *second* engagement (say of 10 nights altogether) his profits per night will average \$260— in all \$2,600: which, added to the \$5,400, makes \$8,000 as

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his profits for the first winter's campaign (of 25 nights) in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.

Then come the Southern and Western theatres, New Orleans, Louisville, Cincinnati, etc., etc., — say 15 or 20 nights, producing \$4,000. His profits, then, *for the first year*, are \$12,000; and he can easily make, for several years more, 4 or 5 thousand a year on the play.

On the Benefit System of *third nights* (with any one to take care of my interests), I should have received at least \$5,000.

The remaining sections of this document deal with the state of affairs existing between himself and Forrest, already discussed. There is another manuscript, in Mrs. Bird's handwriting, giving her version of the difficulty and recording the friendship which existed between a Doctor Black and Bird; it was in Doctor Black's office, through Doctor George McClellan, that Bird first met Forrest. No matter how much further proof is marshalled to measure the business relations between these two, it is evident that the agreements were poorly formulated and that Forrest had the upper hand. He seems even to have taken care to destroy any evidences of Bird's task in revising "Metamora", for when the Bird family later tried to get from him the manuscript, he avowed that he had never used it, as he had at first intended during his London engagement in 1837, and, furthermore, had not the slightest idea where the play in revised form was.

Bird was thoroughly disheartened; his dealings with Forrest prompted him to give up stage writing

entirely. Three years before his death, he consulted a lawyer, John M. Clayton, as to his chances of getting back from Forrest the copies of his plays. Naturally, the legal point of view was that, with no written contract, with the only witness to his bargaining with Forrest being dead (Doctor McClellan), the chances of restitution were against him.

It appears to me [wrote the lawyer, in January, 1851], that if you have suffered him to take copies of the plays and act them, you will have a great deal of trouble to get anything out of him, no matter what he does with them, unless you can prove that the right sold to him was a mere right in him to act them, and not transferable to others. The length of time he has had them tends to strengthen his claim. The copyright ought to be secured to yourself.

When, in later years, Bird's son, Frederick, wrote to Forrest, during 1869, asking for the plays, Forrest, on October 1, asserted that the Bird heirs had no right to title nor to any legal claim in the plays, — they being his by fact of purchase. This ended the matter until long after Forrest's death, when the manuscripts finally came into possession of the author's family.

The probability that Forrest's views were more carefully thought out after this experience is suggested by his letter to W. Gilmore Simms, who wrote him from Charleston regarding the best terms he should make with a manager for the use of one of his own plays. Had the opinions therein expressed been applied to the Bird case, there might have been

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no cause for the dispute which arose between them. The letter ran as follows:

Gilmore Simms, near Medway Post Office, South Carolina.

My dear Simms—I am glad you have employed yourself in preparing a Drama for the stage, and I only regret that more of our American authors do not apply themselves to the cultivation of that most difficult of all literary attainments—the production of a Successful Play.

With regard to the terms you should make with manager Forbes, I scarcely know how to advise you. In London, a manager gives the author a certain sum at first for his play, and, during the run of the piece, he receives further emolument upon such nights as may be specified. But I know of no positive rule which obtains as to remuneration in these matters, depending, as it always does, upon the author's repute and the final success of the piece.

In this country, with only one or perhaps two exceptions, all managers may be held guiltless of ever having paid the first red cent for a native play.

It would be quite fair for you to reserve the right of all interests in your Bantling when strutting his brief hour beyond the limits of Mr. Forbes's present circuit. In the hope to have the pleasure of seeing you when next I visit Charleston, and with most friendly regards to Mrs. Simms, I am, Yours truly,

Edwin Forrest.

New York, January 10, 1844.

The Munificent Prize Giver delighted in making the grand gesture; in his business avariciousness,

he showed himself not loving the American Drama less, but his own fortune more. Always, Forrest's perfectly good motives were poisoned by an egotism which blinded him to justice and colored the world for his own selfish ends.

## CHAPTER VI

### “SO HE DETERMINED TO GO ABROAD”

All his life, Forrest felt the lack of education. He brooded upon it; the idea was with him in his waking hours; it drove him abroad for two years — as soon as he had accumulated enough money to lift his family out of want. Ambition to succeed showed him that what was needed by him was quick acquisition of a world point of view. He interrupted his stage career, obsessed with the idea that an Old World contact would partly compensate for what had been denied him at school age.

It was the fashion to travel, to live in the old romantic tradition. The “Garlands” and “Annuals” were filled with views and descriptions of tarn and lake, of the castled Rhine. College youths were seized with the necessity for European study. It was the Victorian idea. And America was then largely Victorian.

In 1826, Longfellow shook off his Puritan inheritance, as much as he ever could, and sailed for France. Barely out of Bowdoin, he felt the need of escaping his local pressure. France, Spain, Italy, Germany — there was something utilitarian in his tour of several years — a fit preparation for his Bowdoin

professorship. "I have at length reached the shores of the Old World," he wrote to his mother. His father had sent him counsel: "Be careful not to take any part in opposition to the religion or politics of the country in which you reside." The young linguistic prodigy had the weight of restraint put upon his soul. He was a fit person to be scandalized by new scenes.

Forrest turned abroad in far different mood. He also was a precocious flowering of American talent; he was an emissary who had proved his merits, which, in the minds of the hosts of citizens who did him honor, deserved mention with the greatest. Forrest desired to put laurels on the tomb of Garrick; he sought to worship at the shrine of Talma. A delegation accompanied him to the ship. A Democrat was being let loose in monarchical territory. What would be the result?

Fenimore Cooper, too, had sailed in 1826, to be gone for seven years. He, too, had as lofty a view of America as Forrest; he, too, took exception to the English point of view of this country: an American was always guilty until he proved himself otherwise. Said a writer in *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine*, for 1831, reviewing Cooper's career, "He is evidently prouder of his birth than of his genius." Yet it was not without some cause that the American of that day was touchy. Unlike Longfellow, Cooper became intensely concerned in the struggle throughout Europe between democracy and the aristocracy. Yet Europe made him critical of his

own country, when he returned home in 1833. Not so Edwin Forrest. There was no intellectual weighing of what he saw: it was the American eagle crying, “Ha, ha”, with no other particular reason than that it was his nature to do so. William Gilmore Simms was of the same democratic stuff, but he was even more partisan, because he was a Southerner.

In January, 1834, Forrest wrote a characteristic letter to Henry Hart, one of the officers of a literary society in Albany, organized for “mutual improvement.” His eloquence soared into realms of patriotic fervor; no protectionist could have argued the cause of high tariff more emphatically.

In a country like ours [he said], where all men are free and equal, no aristocracy should be tolerated, save that aristocracy of superior mind, before which none need be ashamed to bow. Young men of all occupations will now have a place stored with useful knowledge, where at their leisure they may assemble for mutual instruction and the free interchange of sentiment. A taste for American letters should be carefully disseminated among them, and the parasitical opinion cannot be too soon exploded which teaches that “nothing can be so good as that which emanates from abroad.” Our literature should be independent; and with a hearty wish that the fetters of prejudice which surround it may soon be broken, I enclose the sum of one hundred dollars to be appropriated to the purchase of *books purely American*, to be placed in the library for the use of the young men of Albany.

The sentiment of early days spent in Albany prompted the gesture, but the attitude of mind was

in the air; it all went as part of the general passion to place native ability above background, to break down barriers. Forrest was always sensitive on that score. This young man of twenty-eight, with a twelve-year experience back of him, became suddenly aware — probably the only time in his life he ever did — that he needed to enrich his own mind, to enlarge his own view, to seek that recreation in travel which leaves a deeper understanding of world civilization. Like countless others, it seemed to him that this enrichment could only be had abroad. So he announced that for two years he would take leave of the stage, take leave of those friends he had made — Leggett, Bryant, Wetmore, Halleck, Inman, Dunlap, Lawson — take leave of his books, which an increased income allowed him to buy — and seek new fields of adventure. In his case, native ability must make background!

The Americans of that day rushed to banquets as tokens of public esteem and honor. They wined and dined all visitors; they gave teas and lionized at presidential levees; they were impulsive in their hospitality, naïvely extravagant with their medals of honor. Scorning titles and decorations, we have, throughout the years, hailed opportunities of bestowing insignia of merit upon those who win our esteem. Forrest's friends hastened to organize a committee, among whom Washington Irving, George P. Morris, James Monroe, Isaac S. Hone, J. Fenimore Cooper, and William Gilmore Simms were prominent. And these men agreed that a gold medal

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should be their memento of the occasion, to be publicly bestowed upon the actor at a farewell feast: in bas-relief a bust of Forrest, *Histrioni Optimo* Eduino Forrest, *Viro Præstanti*, and on the reverse side, the Genius of Tragedy and a Shakespearean quotation, “Great in mouths of wisest censure.”

Those were the days when the regular toasts proposed were of a formal, classical order; they were as much to be expected as the sweetened sentiments attached to candied fruits; they were as seriously taken as though they were part of a sacred ritual. There were eight such legends proposed, when the festal board, on July 25, 1834, was cleared, and Edwin Forrest, seated between William T. McCoun and his Honor, the Mayor, Cornelius W. Lawrence, waited to be crowned. The Committee on Arrangements outdid itself in the cultural grace and national pride of its expression. Thus pealed forth the toasts:

“I. *The Drama*. — The mirror of nature, in which life, like Narcissus, delights to contemplate its own image.

“II. *Shakespeare*. — Like his own Banquo, ‘father of a line of kings’ — monarchs who rule with absolute sway the passions and sympathies of the human heart.

“III. *Talent and Worth*. — The only stars and garters of our nobility.

“IV. *Hallam and Henry*. — The Columbus and Vespuccius of the Drama — who planted its standard in the New World.

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“V. *Garrick and Kean.* — The one a fixed and ever-shining light of the stage; the other an erratic star, which dazzled men by its brightness and perplexed them by its wanderings.

“VI. *Kemble and Talma.* — Their genius has identified their memory with the undying fame of Shakespeare and Racine.

“VII. *George Frederick Cooke.* — A link furnished by the Stage to connect the Old World with the New. Britain nursed his genius, America sepulchres his remains.

“VIII. *The Dramatic Genius of Our Country.* — ‘The ruddy brightness of its rise gives token of a goodly day.’ ”

Two years previously, William Dunlap had written the final pages of his “History of the American Theatre”, and had sent them forth, dedicated to his friend, Cooper, the novelist. In them, he detailed the brilliancy of a drama period which to him was about to close: he expressed a hope for the drama of the future, in which he predicted Hackett and Forrest would loom large. Had they not, by their prizes, given tangible encouragement to the native dramatists? The hand and sentiment of Dunlap are seen in these toasts at the Forrest dinner — standards and hopes side by side; a past not yet a century old, a future of infinite possibility.

During the riotous generation of the thirties and forties [writes an historian <sup>1</sup>], despite the advent of new industrial classes who might talk of socialism and other novelties,

<sup>1</sup>“The Rise of the Common Man.” Carl Russell Fish. Page 19.

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and despite the unchecked individualism of the Western pioneer, there remained on the surface some of the decorum of colonial life. In architecture, in costume, in the form of oratory, in the conduct and the content of education, there was sufficient uniformity of aim and method to make it possible to judge whether one had or had not “arrived.”

Forrest was conforming to the ideas of the cultured class, however much he might profess democratic sympathies; his associates at the table were indulging in the “right thing to say on public occasions.” It was a bright moment for the exchange of compliments. England was just as prone to do the same thing. Dickens wrote to Mrs. Macready, after the Astor Place Riot, “It strikes me that we ought to have a dinner to him [Macready] here — just large enough for the proceedings to be made public and no larger — in which this thing should be properly noticed and a reasonable expression of gentlemanly disgust given vent to.”

At the end of the second toast, Chancellor McCoun rose to hail the native son, “nursed into fame by our own encouragement.” What virtue was discoverable in this star who, in so short a time, had lured to him the wealth, the talent, the fashion, and the respectability of our cities — a motley crew who always went well in speeches, if they did not mix well in the lobbies of the theatre! Here was before them in Forrest’s person the liberal hand of him who was encouraging national literature; here as actor was the epitome of *Metamora*, whose genius the testi-

monial of a medal fitly deserved. It was at once proof of his virtue and talent. How proud to emphasize virtue in the theatre before many who may have attended that dinner, puritanically critical of the theatre's ways and morals! Such was to be the tenor of a toast thrown in — the real toast of the evening — *To Edwin Forrest*. That breast, supposed to wear the medal among those who wear abroad the glittering jewelled insignia of title, rose to contemplate the scene. His heart welled over in strains of assumed humility and bursting pride and emotion; he touched upon his boyhood; he referred to those who had written for him; he paid tribute to a mother his success had been able to reward with comfort. His phrases sang the homely sentiments; he even committed this rolling period: "I have been permitted to render her latter days pleasant, 'and rock the cradle of reposing age.'" Standing before Garrick, who now slept with kings; before Talma, whose personations made monarchs tremble; treading the classic soil of Roscius, — he would in heart always be with his native land. If only these scenes could have been romanced, gently satirized, as Dickens knew how to!

So, in substance, spoke Edwin Forrest. And he, too, had a toast to propose, — "The City of New York and its citizens." He bestowed upon them, with royal hand, intelligence, enterprise, integrity, as well as generous and noble spirit. Indeed, as James H. Hackett wrote, in a letter for the occasion, this was a patriotic event; surely there was

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enough emphasis on the high respectability of the actor's calling to satisfy manager Simpson, who could not be present, yet who wrote his sentiments, that the occasion was the symbol of how deserving of reward the profession was.

The night was long and patience untiring, and wine flowed as more toasts were drunk; William Dunlap was honored, Nature and Art were wed, the Drama was made the handmaiden of refinement. His Honor, the Mayor, Thomas A. Cooper, William Leggett exhausted the topics occasioned by the moment.

Another scene must be depicted: Forrest in the arms of Leggett; Forrest assuring Fitz-Greene Halleck that often while on foreign soil he would chant the lines of “Marco Bozzaris”, Forrest on deck the good ship *Sully*, pointing out to the captain the little yacht from which grew fainter and fainter the resounding cheers of a host of friends. Closer and closer were approaching the coils of his discordant life. But now he was off on adventure and culture bent: a turbulent, passionate temperament hastening to see the world.

Well out at sea, Forrest threw aside the weighty mantle of the tragedian, intent on a good time. He was only a young man, accorded honors far in advance of his years. In his Albany experience he had shown himself well able to have fun. He was now to face experiences better in accord with *opera bouffe* than tragedy. He met new conditions with an avid mind, a quick temper, a naïve enjoyment.

There was nothing original in his admiration; he saw what the average tourist sees, recorded in a rather inadequate diary the sights shown the average traveler. There was in him a comfortable feeling that he possessed powers which were typically American, and grandeur of scene drew from him a desire to stretch his wings. Having played the part of *William Tell*, it was characteristic of him that he should seek one of the Tyrolean peaks, and there recite some of the familiar lines of Sheridan Knowles. Alas, that he should be abroad while Knowles was in America, being fêted at public dinners, but being rather shabbily treated in attendance at the theatres. His heart welled with delight when he heard that the author of "Virginius" had called upon his mother and had spoken of America in terms of warmest laudation.

It was one thing to be abroad getting culture; it was an even greater thing meeting with evidences of his own country here and there as he rambled. At Genoa, he saw an American boat bearing the American flag; this warship was his official land; he must pay tribute to it. Out into the bay he was rowed, and the Commander greeted him on deck. Unabashed, Forrest sank upon his knees, the folds of his star-spangled flag to his lips. This was a passion with him, which nothing could daunt. No treasure of old age legacy could make him forget the republican experiment at home. In Florence, he came upon Horatio Greenough, the sculptor, at work upon the Washington statue ordered by the



*After a drawing by Childe, from the Albert Davis Collection*  
FORREST AS A YOUNG MAN  
"What a mountain of a man!"  
— FANNY KEMBLE (1832)



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Government for the nation’s Capitol. Forrest could not but contrast in mind the noble figure of Washington with the Cæsars of Rome. He wrote home :

How my heart warmed with patriotic ardor and my eyes moistened as I looked on the reverend image of the great sage and hero! As an American I felt allied to him, — as an American I felt, too, with a consciousness that diffused a warm and grateful flush upon my cheek, that I was an heir to that sacred legacy of freedom which he and his compatriots bequeathed to their country.

Writing to his mother from Paris, July 3, 1835, he spoke of passing his birthday in Naples and drinking a cup of wine to her, “and my heart grew proud while it acknowledged you the source of its creation.” Ever mindful was he of those tokens which represented his constant thought of his family. In view of his own turbulent family life, it is well to bear this fundamental instinct of his in mind.

I will forward to you by the ship which will carry this letter a small box containing the following articles, viz., a necklace made from the lava of Vesuvius, beautifully carved, and set in gold, together with a pair of ear-rings, for sister Henrietta; a cameo of the three Graces and a pair of lava ear-rings, for Eleanora; a cameo of the Apollo Belvedere and a pair of lava ear-rings, for Caroline. The two cameos Caroline and Eleanora will have set in gold, to wear as breast-pins, and charge the expense thereof to my account.

We have seen such jewelery among the exhibits of that age!

His sympathy seemed to be aroused, everywhere he went, by the flow of human life on street and highway, in café and palace; his sense of theatre delighted in the contrasts of every degree of person playing his part. Presented to King Louis Philippe, amidst the gorgeous pomp and ceremony of the court, his eye was not blinded by the dazzle of jewels or the magnificence of lustre everywhere. He saw the ogling old ladies scheming for their daughters; he watched their "pride, envy, ambition, and coquetry" all at work. In his correspondence, he never failed to give graphic description of what he saw, using apt literary allusion and quotation, and revealing an uncommon descriptive sense. When his name was called for presentation to Louis, he declares, "I entered, and made my *début* before the King of France with not half the trepidation I experienced on presenting myself for the first time before a *sovereign* in New York — I mean the sovereign people — on an occasion you will recollect." Always at his command there was an ample store of satire. "Our plain republicans often laugh at the mimic monarchs of the stage, for their want of grace and dignity," he writes. "A trip to court would satisfy them that real monarchs are not always overstocked with those qualities." But the great fact was ever present in his mind, that the object of this trip abroad was to acquire knowledge. From Paris, he writes:

New sources of various information have opened themselves to my mind at every turn in this great and gay and ever-changing metropolis; and whether I hereafter

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resume the buskin, or play a more real part in the drama of life, I think I shall find my gleanings here of service to me.

We wonder sometimes whether Forrest was not generally on parade in his written word; and whether the actual social experiences he met with were not of a gayer, a less studied kind. Fortunately, through Henry Wikoff — friend of Forrest and Fanny Elssler — we see a more volatile nature, an easier response to condition. The unfortunate thing is that while Forrest claims he met the cream of art and theatre life in London and Paris, he rarely mentions specific names, but generalizes, as, for instance, when he sums up his time in Paris, which he finally left with reluctance. He writes, “I have mingled with all ranks of people, from the monarch who wears ‘the golden round and top of sovereignty’, down to the lowest of his subjects,

‘In smoky cribs,  
Upon uneasy pallets stretching them.’”

And later he adds :

Human nature, as modified by the different circumstances of life and fortune, presents an ample and diversified volume to her student in Paris: and in this bustling and glittering panorama, where everything seems most artificial, one who looks beneath the surface may learn much of the secret feelings, motives, passions, and genius of man.

So ran his thoughts when he visited the Prison of Ste. Pélagie.

A letter to his mother, dated February 8, 1835, from Paris, outlines his travel plans thus:

Tomorrow I set out for Italy in company with Mr. Wikoff, his friend Mr. Williams, and Mr. Paine, of Boston, so, you see, there will be a good party to look after each other in case of need.

We intend travelling by post, and purpose visiting Turin, Pisa, Genoa, Leghorn, Florence, Rome, and Naples. These are the places we shall see first, and divide the time among them so as to be in Rome during the Holy Week and the two last days of the Carnival. I should like to go into Italy by the way of Marseilles, but am prevented by a quarantine of forty days which persons are forced to undergo who pass through that city in consequence of a few cases of cholera which existed there a month back. The folks here, you perceive, are more afraid of this dreadful scourge than the people in our country. We shall therefore cross the Alps by Mont Cenis. I shall remain in Italy until the end of April, then return to France, Geneva, and so into Switzerland.

A formidable outlay, but in Forrest's correspondence there is no great surprise manifest over any scene or condition. He had traveled extensively over his own country, and was scarcely to be thrilled by what he called "the miniature features of Europe." The French countryside was lacking the "agreeable interruption" of snakelike fences that lined the American farm land. Crossing Mont Cenis appealed to his fancy because Napoleon, one of his heroes, had likewise crossed it, but the Alps had no startling thrill for him. He writes:

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A Kentuckian, once riding with me on the Albany and Troy turnpike, after an interval of silence, in which he was probably comparing that smooth road with the rough-hewn ways of his own State, suddenly broke out, “Well, this road has the leetlest tilt from a level I ever did see!” The odd expression occurred to my mind more than once in crossing the Alps. It may do to talk of the terrors of the Alps to certain lap-nursed Europeans, who have never surmounted any but mole-hill difficulties; but to Americans — or such Americans, at least, as have seen something of their own magnificent country . . . the Alps have no terror in their threats. Land-Admiral Reeside or honest Joe Webster of Albany would enjoy a hearty laugh to see for himself what Alpine dangers are, and with one of his fast teams would contract to take you over the mountains in no time at any season of the year.

In Turin the carnival was on. Forrest’s description of this is full of color; he shows the artist’s sense of proportion, his eye is sensitive to arrangement. He writes :

The traveller who would view the Carnival in its most attractive guise should not break in upon it with the pale light of morning, as what I saw on entering Turin fully satisfied me. The lamps were still burning in the streets, and the maskers wearily returning to their several homes. Poor Harlequin, with sprained ankle, limped tediously away. Columbine hung listlessly upon the arm of Pantaloон, whose chalky visage was without a smile, and whose thoughts, if he thought at all, were probably running much upon the same theme as honest Sancho’s when he pronounced a blessing on the man who first invented sleep. These exhausted revellers, a weary sentinel here

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and there half dozing on his post, and a houseless beggar wandering on his unappointed course, were the sights that first drew my attention on entering the gates of Turin.

He was to get a taste of the carnival romance again when he reached Rome. Henry Wikoff records the childish glee of his participation: "It amused me not a little to see Forrest, who was associated in my mind with all sorts of heroic characters on the stage, utterly absorbed in this rather undignified pastime." This suggests somewhat that Forrest's actions were more boyish and less sedate than his written words would indicate.

But always, in the midst of such gay scenes and bright colors, Forrest was mindful of the fact that he was far from his beloved Democracy; everywhere about him were signs of oppression which measured the ominous nature of aristocratic government. "What a contrast," he exclaimed, "it suggested, in turning my thoughts to my own land, where government is the people's choice, the rulers their servants, and laws nothing more than recorded public opinion!" Political sentiments which sounded well but which were far from the strictest truth.

He never once forgot, wherever he happened to be, that his chief interest was the theatre; that he desired to broaden his outlook upon acting technique. When he was in London, he witnessed performances by Liston and Farren, but even these could not dispel his notion that Henry Placide, at home, was the best actor on the stage. John Liston (1776-1846), Charles Lamb's favorite comedian,

was redolent with comic humor; his was an effortless good sense that easily held his audience in grip. Elizabeth Farren (1759-1829), who was born, so sang “Anthony Pasquin”, “to cheer human-kind, like the rays of Aurora”, was the natural successor of Mrs. Abington as *Lady Teazle*, and had a reputation for being “the most perfect fine lady the stage ever boasted”, to use the words of William Robson; while Tate Wilkinson described her as one in whom were centred “fashion, ease, pleasantry, and elegance.” The lack of any full comment from Forrest as to the acting of these two comedians would suggest that his own concern for tragedy made him incapable of appreciating the light phases of drama. As for his praise of Placide (1799-1870), who was, par excellence, a comedian of easy flexibility, and whose *Lord Ogleby*, *Sir Peter Teazle*, and *Sir Anthony Absolute* created a standard in America never surpassed, he was but reflecting the general opinion of every one at that time, and his decisive statement may have been another welling up of his ever-ready patriotism. This local critical spirit is mindful of the time when E. L. Davenport, in 1849, was appearing in London with Mrs. Anna Cora Mowatt, and wrote to a friend of the relative merits of acting in the two countries.

I still hold [he declared] to my original opinion that we have more natural talent in America, but not so much application. We are careless. I mean all concerned, from managers to supers. Here, rehearsals are made of importance, and when a piece is to be done, the property

men, musicians, and actors, must each do their share. It is a system here, that I should gladly see introduced into our theatres, and if ever I have power, I will strive to bring around.

We can play Shakespeare almost without a rehearsal. Not so here. The actors and all know and feel their responsibility (I am speaking of the greatest theatres), and for their own credit's sake are alive to all. Stage appointments are also here more attended to, effects of scenery more studied, the artist being for a period the director for his own purpose; then the machinist, and then, with good acting, regulated by a stage-manager who knows his business, you see things done well; but remove any one of the screws and you will have a lame machine. . . . Yet in talent I say we can lick 'em. I 've seen only one actress here yet that I would engage as leading woman — I mean after stars — and her name is Fanny Vining.

C. Cushman can lick all the tragedy ones (heavy); and our little Mowatt, all the juvenile and comedy ones. . . . There is no old man can compare with Henry Placide, and young Wheatleigh and Murdoch can hang 'em all in light comedy. So you see we go, and yet they are so loth to allow that Yankees have talent.

It was during this London period that in October, 1850, when Macready was taking his farewell, he engaged Davenport to fill the place made vacant in his company by the resignation of J. W. Wallack. To the very last the English actor was true to his colors; he sought in every way to suppress all effort other than his own. "I wish you would not act quite so much," he told Davenport, during one per-

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formance, “your extreme earnestness detracts from the legitimate effect.” The Astor Place Riot had not softened his arrogance.

Forrest and Wikoff together went to Hamburg, on their way to St. Petersburg. The impression made upon the tragedian, when he attended a performance of Schiller’s “*Don Carlos*”, at the Hamburg Stadt Theatre, was not as great as that made upon him by the attentive audience, which for four and a half hours gave undivided attention. “How an American audience would have shuffled!” exclaimed Forrest. Wikoff records that Russia was not over cordial to visitors, but there being less formalities imposed upon those of military rank, Forrest “transformed himself forthwith into a Colonel of the U. S. ‘Screamers.’ In harmony with his new rank, he donned a frock-coat for undress uniform, richly frogged, and mounted a military cap with gold braid.” In such guise he visited the tomb of Peter the Great; he went to the Kremlin; he paced up and down upon the little stage in the Palace of Tzarskoe Selo, and suddenly burst forth into lines from “*Othello*.” During these days his temper served him in good stead; he roared at the waiters who were not prompt with his Moselle; he swore at a ferryman who refused to row them across a river; he chafed whenever he had to be confined for any length of time in a diligence.

From Moscow, the two companions went to Odessa, where, says Wikoff, the daughter of General Sontag played “*Hail Columbia*” and “*Yankee*

Doodle", when "Forrest said he came near shouting 'Hurrah for Jackson !'"— the favorite mode, in those days, for a Democrat to express his strongest emotions.

In Crimea, Forrest and Wikoff dined with the Prince and Princess Woronzow, and Forrest, always given to the romantic, became enamored of a Polish Countess, whose husband was a political prisoner. Sabanska was her name, and her mood lay between extreme vivacity and silent melancholy. "How I should have liked to read the depths of her soul, and know what was moving there," declared Forrest, in one of his letters, which gives an external view of the Woronzow ménage, but suggests nothing of his own personal emotions, which made him wander in the gardens, reciting the lines, "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!" If he desired to linger in Odessa longer than his schedule time, it was for the sake of Countess Sabanska. She fascinated him, though he could not accustom himself to the habit of women smoking cigarettes!

Thus the two friends wandered through Middle Europe, Forrest's own inclination being to return to his beloved Paris, with a quick passage through Germany. As he went, he responded in guidebook fashion to the riches of Constantinople, of Smyrna, of Athens. He wrote to Leggett of his tour in phrases of oratorical dignity. Such talk is written for posing, for gesture.

Since I saw you [he said] . . . I have traversed the Baltic and the wide dominions of the ambitious Autocrat, — crossed the Euxine and dipped into Asia and European

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Turkey — “kept due onwards to the Propontic and Hellespont,” — wandered amid the faultless fragments of the “bright clime of battle and of song,” — sailed by the Ionian Isles, — visited the chief towns of the Germanic Confederation, — and here I am at last, safe and sound, in the ever-gay capital of France.

It is with Russia that he has been fascinated, — its massiveness, its hordes subject to the imperious sovereign will. Everywhere he went, he strove to associate himself with the scene, — a stage *William Tell*, for instance, among the scenes of Tell’s own life — a *Richard*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Lear*, standing amidst Shakespearean scenes in Stratford-on-Avon.

At times, all this activity and change palled upon him. He wrote often in melancholy mood to his mother; nothing he desired more than to be back with her. Sights he had seen, books he had read to vivify localities he had visited, and he was never to doubt the necessity for such trips in the broader culture of a man. In later years he wrote to his close friend, Daniel Dougherty :

I was delighted to hear . . . that you were in the enjoyment of all the glorious sights and sounds which present themselves to the intelligent traveller who, for the first time, visits the scenes of highest European civilization. You will be amply repaid for all the toil and trouble it has cost you, when you return to your own fireside and calmly “live o’er the scenes” again, and recount the treasures you have won.

How correct and studied the attitudes of causes and effects! If his friends regarded him always as by

nature fit only for the representation of classic heroes, did he ever forget the fact? He was always posing, always striking attitudes, always trying his powers. And to his credit always storing away bits of knowledge in the belief they would give him the culture and refinement he never quite grasped or made his own.

When, in July, 1836, he set sail for home, he had been absent nearly two years. No better sonnet could he have applied to himself than Keats' on Chapman's Homer; new planets were swimming into his ken; he had been true to his purpose not to act during the period of travel, but when, in his last month, the possibility was discussed of his filling a Drury Lane engagement the following October, he was doubtful whether the English would receive him fairly, so prejudiced were they — according to his unsteady estimation — against Americans. Yet this was quite opposite to what he had experienced as a guest; for he had written home that he had been given ample proofs of the sincerity of English hospitality. Besides, on this first trip he had met the Sinclairs, at their house in Alfred Place, and had heard the famous ballad singer, and had been smitten by the sight of nineteen-year-old Catherine. Indeed, much had happened in the life of Edwin Forrest, when he stepped ashore in New York, on August 5, 1836, greeted at the dock by a host of friends. There is no mention made of his being travel worn, but we do know that, as he hastened toward the ship which was to bring him home, his coach was upset, and he escaped with only a few contusions!

## CHAPTER VII

### IN WHICH MR. MACREADY BECOMES DEEPLY DISTURBED

Forrest now stood at the threshold of his second great adventure. The thrill of Europe was full upon him, and his home-coming had been in the way of a triumph. Eager crowds had shouted welcome at the Philadelphia Chestnut Street Theatre, as he came before them in his old rôles of *Damon*, *Othello*, and *Spartacus*. And at the New York Park Theatre, where he revived his *Lear*, devotees paid premium prices to see their young favorite. For they all knew that Forrest had accepted an offer to return to England for an October engagement. This was the last opportunity for cheering their champion across seas. Money came with ease, five hundred dollars a night; profits bulked temptingly. Three thousand dollars for six appearances at the Park—a phenomenal valuation! Three years before, Thomas A. Cooper had been given two benefits, so deeply in want was the old idol. Contrasts in the theatre are oftentimes grotesque!

At this moment Forrest had but freshly confessed, in a curtain speech, his confidence in being cordially received in London. There was no whit of challenge

in his voice, but there was dominant the superiority complex which suggested that America, having been successful in two wars, could brook no defeat whatsoever in the theatre. He had said :

The engagement which I am about to fulfil in London was not of my seeking. While I was in England I was repeatedly importuned with solicitations, and the most liberal offers were made to me. I finally consented, not for my own sake, for my ambition is satisfied with the plaudits of my own countrymen, but partly in compliance with the wishes of a number of American friends, and partly to solve a doubt which is entertained by many of our citizens, whether Englishmen would receive an American actor with the same favor which is here extended to them. This doubt, so far as I have had an opportunity of judging, is, I think, without foundation. During my residence in England, I found among the English people the most unbounded hospitality, and the warmest affection for my beloved country and her institutions. With this impression, I have resolved to present to them an American tragedy, supported by the humble efforts of the individual who stands before you. If I fail — I fail. But, whatever may be the result, the approbation of that public which first stamped the native dramatist and actor will ever be my proudest recollection.

It can be readily seen from this that Edwin Forrest went to England as a doughty champion. There was already rampant a restive feeling that our theatre was dominated by the English actor and manager — as it undoubtedly was; that there was little opportunity afforded the native playwright for encouragement, since the average repertory

showed very small inroads of the native play. Forrest had posed as the saviour of the American drama. This has been disproven by the conditions imposed and the results. So that he faced his London venture thoroughly primed. From now until the outbreak of the Astor Place tragedy, Forrest was to be the centre of storm.

Speaking of the English visitors who came with regularity to the United States between 1825 and 1845, Mr. Allan Nevins remarks that "it became easy and profitable for gentlemen of conservative minds to visit America at the very period in which the clamor of the Tory press, the storm that swept away the rotten boroughs, the rising Chartist agitation, and other phenomena, were inflaming these gentlemen against both the American republic and the English democratic movement." The social revolution was in progress; Democracy — especially Jacksonian Democracy — had given free outlet to bad manners, which seemed to be flaunted in the face of the aristocratic conservative as the particular right of the free citizen. Reviewing dispassionately the strictures hurled against us by such a vituperative lady as Mrs. Trollope, by such a well-disposed observer as Dickens, by the sympathetic Miss Martineau, it can be said with all fairness that we deserved much of the criticism we received from them. Our excuse was our youth (it still is our excuse, though Oscar Wilde was discerning when he declared that our youth had become our oldest tradition!), our concern was for material progress. But all told,

the English travelers of this period kept the balances of comparison well equalized, and their strictures against us were no more flagrant than those against themselves. Mrs. Trollope's "Domestic Manners of the Americans" (1832), Harriet Martineau's "A Retrospect of Western Travel" (1838) and "Society in America" (1839), Fanny Kemble's "Journals" (1835) and her "Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839", Captain Marryat's "Diary in America" (1839), Dickens' "American Notes" (1842), present us with a commentary freely—maybe not diplomatically—given of our quick wit, our naïve tastes, our low average level of interest in things intellectual and artistic, our parvenuism.

Forrest was a product of this era. His quick temper, thrilled by the unrestricted opportunity to make good, roused by any contact with a conservative superiority, was apt to be resentful, over-watchful, dangerously suspicious, disagreeably aggressive.

While John Howard Payne may be considered our earliest emissary to London, in 1813, he became so quickly identified with English theatre condition, so readily absorbed in the society of such men as John Philip Kemble, Campbell, Coleridge, Southey, and Lamb, that when he returned to America, in 1832, there was nothing very national about him save accident of birth and a sentimental love of country—as romantic as his "Home, Sweet Home."

In 1826, James H. Hackett had sailed for London with his Yankee stories, and had regaled theatregoers

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with his imitations of Kean and Macready. He had returned again in 1832 and had given an unctious performance of *Falstaff*. But Forrest, the native star, was ready to prove to a London public that American native talent could hold its own against England's best tradition. The American eagle was young; the British lion was sophisticated.

It is claimed that James K. Paulding had warned Forrest not to go. Neither Washington nor Jackson had to look to London for fame, he exulted. In 1830, he had won a three hundred dollar prize for "The Lion of the West", in which *Nimrod Wildfire* was shaped as a vehicle for Hackett. The triumvirate, W. C. Bryant, Fitz-Greene Halleck, and Prosper M. Wetmore, had served on the prize committee, even as they served as judges for Forrest. Paulding was conscious of English domination in our American theatre. He had declared, in his preface to "The Bucktails; or, Americans in England", that such invasion of foreign drama must cease. "Like every other people," he wrote, "we require a drama of our own, based on our own manners, habits, character, and political institutions." He had pursued the same theme in the *American Quarterly Review* for 1827.

Nevertheless, Forrest welcomed the new experience offered him, and he set sail, accompanied by friends as far as Sandy Hook. "We kept in sight of the vessel till near sundown, by which time she had made a good offing," wrote William Leggett, the next day, September 19, 1836, from the office of the *Evening*

*Post.* Mother Rebecca must have been proud, on the receipt of such a letter — her Edwin already, at the age of thirty, America's foremost "star." "While we were on board the vessel with him," Leggett continued, "we were invited by the captain to sit down to a collation prepared for the occasion, and had the satisfaction of drinking to his health and prosperous voyage, not only across the Atlantic Ocean, but across the ocean of life also, in a glass of sparkling champagne." Forrest had warmly desired Leggett to accompany him — an American journalist who could back his words with the pistol. Mayhap it was well he could not go!

He arrived in England, eager and full of preparation for his opening at Drury Lane, October 17, 1836 — an engagement which was to last until December 19. He faced an interesting, a challenging situation. William Macready was Forrest's senior by thirteen years. Alfred Bunn was manager of Drury Lane, and he had inveigled Macready to join his company at a salary of thirty pounds a week. Macready had had a much richer acting experience than Forrest in the variety of his rôles, and in the course of one month, October, 1835, had played *Jacques*, *Hamlet*, *Hotspur*, *Leontes*, *Lord Townley*, and *Othello*. But, in the course of the season, he had had a misunderstanding with Bunn and had gone over to Covent Garden, under the management of C. G. Osbaldiston, and here, beginning in May, 1836, he had played in "Macbeth", had appeared with Helen Faucit in "The Stranger", and had taken part in

the première of T. N. Talfourd's "Ion" on his birthday night, after which a little supper party had brought together Wordsworth and Landor and Browning, Forster and Ellen Tree and Miss Mitford. A few days later, he played with Sheridan Knowles, and in October of the same year was to play *Macbeth* and appear opposite Charles Kemble, who was giving his farewell performances. At that supper party after "Ion", Browning confessed that Macready had said to him: "Will you write me a tragedy and save me from going to America?" And the next year, in May, "Stratford" was produced.

This was the theatre and the literary background against which Macready moved when Edwin Forrest reached London. That Bunn was to be his manager was of no immediate significance, though it was another of those instances where the two actors were to find themselves "run" in opposition to each other. Macready, as we have stated, had been in America, arriving there first on September 27, 1826, under the management of Stephen Price, of the Park Theatre. Forrest was then but twenty, yet he had already, at a public dinner, been praised by Kean. In New York, Forrest had played at the Bowery Theatre against Macready at the Park Theatre, in "Virginius"; but this competition of rival houses did not at the time strike a personal note.

A curious and palpitant audience crowded Drury Lane on Forrest's opening night. The American colony — headed by the American minister — sat with patriotic expectancy; the stolid Britons were

curious and doubtful. The American broadside was to be shot straight across the footlights. Was it wise — or politic — for this young man to select *Spartacus*, in such a stilted piece of dramaturgy as “The Gladiator”, instead of coming right to the point and facing comparisons in Shakespeare? Was there any particular merit in a play because it was of American growth? Joseph Jefferson called it “a bloody piece of business altogether, and it is a play that could not fail to disgust the sensibilities of a select audience.” Maybe there was that in the new piece peculiarly suited to the native idiosyncracies of the actor. The *Morning Advertiser* was surprised that Forrest’s “enunciation, which we had anticipated to be characterized by some degree of that *patois* which distinguishes most Americans, even the best educated, was almost perfect ‘to the last recorded syllable’, and fell like music on the ears.” But Bunn has declared that, though he was well pleased with Forrest’s fine declamatory powers, “his level speaking is occasionally infected by a provincialism which gives many of his words a sound that does not belong to them.” The papers admired the strongly marked muscular body, “a model for stage effect”; they commended the rough music of his voice, “befitting one who in his youth had dwelt, a free barbarian, among the mountains.” They came on this opening night, suspicious of seeing an Indian; instead of which they were greeted by a whirlwind of emotion well placed. “Though he is not, strictly speaking, what is called a classical actor,”

declared one critic, "yet he has all the energy, all the indomitable love of freedom that characterizes the trans-Atlantic world. We say this because there were many republican allusions in the play, where the man spoke out quite as much as the actor, if not more."

Of course it was inevitable that there should be comparisons with Kean, but the critics waited for his second essayal, *Othello*, to put Forrest under the fire of such scrutiny. It was this ordeal, probably, which finally prompted Forrest to select *Spartacus* for his opening attempt; it was a London première of a new player in a new play. They could estimate the young Farnese Hercules on his own merits: the strongly marked features, the well-set head and neck, the powerfully aggressive body, the deep-toned voice. In the selection of *Spartacus*, however, he was conciliatory, for Henry Wikoff tells us he would have selected *Othello* for this opening, had he not been strongly urged not to. He was always eager to face the fight, to come to blows.

Forrest had evidently talked over with manager Bunn the chances of his acceptance by the British public and had expressed himself strongly on the causes for irritation which existed between the two countries. To Forrest's belief in a decided prejudice against the American actor, Bunn would not give credence, though in his highly excellent book of reminiscences, "The Stage: Both Before and Behind the Curtain", the Drury Lane manager confessed emphatically, "With the exception of Mr. Forrest,

there is no American performer, whom I have seen, that has any right to expect on the London stage the favour which has been extended to English performers on the principal stages in America. I put out of the question any nonsensical matter of hospitality, which is the duty of all countries to give, and the right of all countries to expect." He could not place Hackett in the same class with Charles Mathews, for instance. But Forrest was of the calibre which gave him position with Kean and Charles Kemble.

Witnessing this first performance was John Forster, who brought his astute, though partisan, discernment to bear upon the newcomer. Alger passes over the *Examiner* of this period, though, reflecting the sore temper of Forrest, he was to damn the *Examiner* in 1845. None the less, Forster dealt with Robert Montgomery Bird in a discerning manner:

The tragedy is easily disposed of. It is written on an essentially false principle. Its interest, from the beginning to the end, is purely physical. We would as soon have thought of introducing a few real gladiators at an English supper-table, with instructions that they should tear themselves to pieces by way of surprising and delighting the guests, as we would have presented such a succession of scenes in an English theatre. The author had no more business to seek for what he may suppose to be animation, in blood and broken bones, than he would have to look for passion or tenderness in the stews. If it be true, which we regret to say we think it is, that the Romans had really more taste for murder than morality, it does not follow that in the tragedies selected from their

history murder should surmount morality. It is for this very reason that the mind of the poet should be placed at its highest exaltation, to discern and bring out some "soul of goodness." Lord Bacon has nobly expressed this in his definition of the uses of poetry. "The use of poetry," saith his lordship, "hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man, in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it, the world being, in proportion, inferior to the soul; by reason whereof there is agreeable to the spirit of man, a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety than can be found in the nature of things. . . . Poetry was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because *it doth raise and erect the mind by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind*; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things." Now we can conceive a tragedy, with this *Spartacus* as its hero, written on such a principle of chastening and elevating the mind; — in which the rude and violent passions that are exhibited should have it in their office to check and inhibit the passions of the audience before whom they are presented; and in which Pain should not be used to gripe and crush the heart, to sicken the soul and grovel it in the dust of mortality, but rather to show how triumphant even its effects may be, when the spirit of man yet wrestles with, and morally overcomes, the pangs under which his body is temporarily about to expire. The true dramatic capabilities of *Spartacus* are scarcely less decided than the failure of the present tragedy was conspicuous. If a genuine writer of the heart had selected the subject, with what picturesque and romantic truth he would have brought out the sublime soul of the Thracian peasant, living and breathing still in millions

of men, in contrast with the now scarred and awful ruins of the republic of Rome! It is impossible to make up for such a failure of treatment by extraordinary movement, force, or energy. It was well said by the ancient critic, that where the heart is not shaken even the gods may thunder and stride in vain; but, supposing there was a hope in this way, the author of this tragedy cannot even thunder. (October 23, 1836.)

No wonder, holding this opinion, Forster believed that judgment of Forrest must be withheld until one of the great English plays was given. Though "not an indifferent actor", there was to be seen a want of flexibility in his voice; a use of artificial tones coming from the top of his throat; but withal, "there is no levity, no feebleness, no indifference in his manner." His realistic imitation of the death rattle in his death scene was repulsive to Forster. He would warn Forrest, that "it requires far more skill . . . to finger and stop an instrument than to blow it." Laborious study is what the young man needs; growth in that finer sensitiveness which will repel in him any inclination "to raise himself by effort on vulgar points and peaks before the audience, instead of pervading the stage, as it were, insensibly, with vigorous yet ever easy emotion."

Forrest was made well aware of the cordial disposition of the audience to him, though he was soon shown, when he came to thank them for their generosity, that their opinion of the play did not rank high; nor would they quite accede to his belief that the reception given him was proof of British good

will towards America. The London *Times* (October 18, 1836) made this point. The sum total of the result of this first performance was that it piqued curiosity to see what Forrest might do in a play less uncouth than that by Doctor Bird. Forrest retired to his hotel, leaving a dead dramatist on the field!

His appearance was the talk of the town. Great interest was manifest in the man, even if the play had been damned. Already Macready had sought him out, inquiring for him at the Garrick Club and the Covent Garden Theatre, and finding him at a Mr. Hughes'. In the famous Diary, under the date of October 14, 1836, he records: "Liked him much — a noble appearance, and a manly, mild and interesting demeanour. I welcomed him — wished him success, and invited him to my house."

This was the season for compliments. Writing later to Leggett, Forrest said of Macready that he "has behaved in the handsomest manner to me. Before I arrived in England, he had spoken of me in the most flattering terms, and, on my arrival, he embraced the earliest opportunity to call upon me, since which time he has extended to me many delicate courtesies and attentions, all showing the native kindness of his heart, and great refinement and good breeding."

Nevertheless, the spirit of jealousy was rampant even thus early. We note Macready saying, when he heard Forrest was likely to make a hit, "This I could *sincerely wish*, while it did no injury to myself; but my home is so dear to me that charity

must satisfy itself there before it can range abroad." This cultured, small, finicky mind of Macready had suspected a possible rival. Against such feeling, unconsciously though it might at that time have been felt, Forrest opposed a similar youthful boastfulness. Macready records, "He mentioned to me his purpose of leaving the stage, and devoting himself to politics;" then added, as a sneering — or shall we say critical? — after thought, "If he should become President!"

After the opening night, reports were brought to Macready of the individual success of the American actor. "When I saw him nine years ago," he wrote, "he had everything within himself to make a very great actor." What contrary emotions were rife in Macready's heart! He must be magnanimous, yet guarded. His spirits were low because the situation, in his small view, was formidable. He scanned the papers — they were full of praise; he questioned friends — they were reticent. He arranged for Forrest to dine. He wrote Forster imperiously to "deal liberally and kindly" with the visitor. He primed himself for his own performance of *Othello*, knowing that Forrest was to make his second London appearance in the same rôle. He played the part on October 20 and was apparently nervous.

On October 24, Macready's friends — Dow and Forster — came with news of Forrest's performance. "It would be stupid and shallow hypocrisy to say that I was indifferent to the result," he confessed, "— careless whether he is likely to be esteemed less

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or more than myself; it is of great importance to me to retain my superiority, and my wishes for his success follow the desire I have to be considered above him! Is this illiberal? I hope not. Their accounts of his performance have certainly reduced very much my opinion of his mind, which, from the particulars they related, cannot be of the highest order." Catching at straws, showing the "actory fear" of losing ground!

One can imagine two anxious faces peering through the London papers to see how the American's *Othello* fared — Forrest in hopeful expectation, Macready equally as anxious that no one should receive more applause than he.

Edmund Kean had died in 1833, and his renown was fresh in people's memory. Had not Fanny Kemble exclaimed, "Kean is gone, and with him are gone *Othello*, *Shylock*, and *Richard*"? Yet Forrest had come to challenge the position of this torrential genius. Alger selects for his biography the most gratifying examples of praise that were heard about the American. Some were even so magnanimously generous as to say that there were at moments touches of poetic grandeur to him superior to Kean — even though it be Kean during the waning hours of his career. They detected a constraint in Forrest which might be laid to nervousness, but his general conception of the character suggested a thoughtful tragedian — in fact made him "the most promising tragedian that has appeared in our day." Gall and wormwood to Macready! He was indignant

that the *Times* should even hint (October 25, 1836) that Forrest's sensibility and vigorous style should be superior to his own, should ever be called "among the very best displays that the stage in this country can boast of."

Macready found comfort in the indignation of his friend Forster. It looked very much to them as though, to use Macready's own words, there was a "*set* that is making against me to elevate Mr. Forrest." Wise in his method, even if not over-subtle, Macready continued to beseech Forster "not to write in harshness or hostility upon his (Forrest's) performance." Everywhere he turned, in the papers, in the playbills brought to him from Drury Lane, there smote on his vision the line : "The most extraordinary actor of the day." Did it not seem as though all of Macready's friends were in arms against the American invader and were intent on keeping sore the rankle in Macready's bosom ? The latter hearkened to Browning descanting upon the *Athenæum*'s praise of Forrest's voice, when lo, a knock on the door, and Forrest himself to call, with Stephen Price and others ! Now indeed was a strain put upon the good breeding of Macready. If he had only possessed the sense to realize how completely he was the centre of literary things, as they pertained to the London theatre of that time -- Browning writing for him, Bulwer-Lytton working on the "Duchess de la Vallière" for him, Talfourd's "Ion" current !

Talfourd was whispering that Forster's strictures on Forrest's *Othello* were well-deserved. Who, que-



*From the Albert Davis Collection*

**FORREST AS OTHELLO**

*"Of his advantages of personal appearance, which are to an actor a part of his stock in trade, we have before spoken; and these advantages were enhanced by the judicious choice of a dress, which, while it suited his figure and the part perfectly, presented a highly picturesque effect."*

— LONDON TIMES, October 25, 1836



ried Forster, could ever witness Macready's dusky Moor without retaining golden opinions of it? Yet Forrest was given to "little fierce bursts of passions"; he showed "no intellectual comprehension of what he was about." To Forster, the American was but a gross, vulgar imitation of Kean, his master; he aimed at the intellect through the physical; he uttered sound which suggested nothing of the sense; mechanically he varied the tender and fiery motives of the play. "By way of winding up with a striking effect at the close of the tremendous 'I'd rather be a toad,' etc., Mr. Forrest literally sprang back with the demivolte of a fencer up the stage, and, catching his glimpse of the coming *Desdemona*, threw himself into a sort of tenderly gladiatorial position, and waited for the volleys of applause that broke from the stalls and the galleries." Point by point, the words came scalding and unmasked.

But they were well planned, these thrusts which may have shown critical acumen—yet were prompted by partisan loyalty to Macready. The telltale Diary paints the picture, Macready assuming the air of injured innocence. But, like all diaries of a gossipy nature, this record of daily travail, display of temperament, posing, and oftentimes sincere concern for the theatre, reveals much of the social life lived by Forrest during this first tour in England. Was Macready really anxious to palliate the irritable attitude of Forster, or was his generosity placed with a purpose? For he truly thought himself badly used by the press in comparison with this

second-rate American; he was as thoroughly convinced of a plot to do him harm as Forrest was that Forster's spleen was nurtured by a clique against him. After all, there was no secret that Forster acted as Macready's literary go-between.

The situation was a great strain on the nervous temper of Macready. Queer notions were abroad as to Forrest's countrymen. Miss Martineau was whispering to Macready not too nice things about the private character of Daniel Webster (and even so late as 1912, Toynbee, editor of the Macready Diaries, had a footnote to this particular, explaining that Webster was the "United States President." Alas, Webster would have had it so!). We learn how anxious Macready was to know when the engagement of Forrest at Drury Lane was to draw to a close. It is a comic-opera situation, in which Macready was totally uncontrolled in his jealousy, though trying to play "Lady Bountiful." The entry for November 10 is revelatory. Macready had been speaking to Mr. W. Jones, through whose negotiations Bunn had made the contract with the American tragedian. It was after Macready's performance of "King John" — back stage — and a little underhanded deceit is practiced.

"I asked him (Mr. Jones) to step into my room after the play; inquired of him when Forrest's engagement was likely to close, as I should like to pay some professional compliment to him. He said it was uncertain, it might end in a week or go on for months. He added that Mr. Forrest was

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very much gratified by the attention I had paid him."

How ardent was Mr. Macready in his desire that Forrest be made happy on his visit! So he tried to make Mr. Jones believe. How sincerely he had pleaded with Forster to be less meticulously exacting in his *Examiner* notices! He had written the adamant critic, had solicited his friends to beg him to change his tone. Of course, replied Jones, neither he nor Mr. Forrest would believe that these attacks had come through the instigation of Mr. Macready, even though it had been constantly suggested. Verily, replied the actor, acting the part to the hilt, his own personal integrity was above the need of contradicting such baseness! Surely, assented the wily Mr. Jones. Seeing his vantage, he shot forth a dart. Mr. Talfourd had sent Forrest a copy of his "Ion." No wonder we find, a few entries after this, when Talfourd himself told Macready of the correspondence that had passed between him and the American player, "Talfourd is a weak, an inconsistent, not a sterling man. I do not like *the mode* of showing me the letter." But was n't Talfourd's solicitude in the matter a commentary on Macready's consuming touchiness? Macready was attitudinizing, was playing the spoiled child. His was a good intellect, warped by priggishness! "Am I envious?" he often asked himself. Yes, Mr. Macready! Your behavior was not very elegant, and elegance was the word of the day, from dinners to manners!

In the meantime Forrest was fulfilling his engagement, bearding the British lion in his den. The *London Times*, on viewing his *Lear*, given November 4, remarked particularly on the scene of *Lear's* curse upon his daughters, "more powerful than anything that has lately been done on the stage." As a whole, they claimed, Forrest's conception "was natural, true, and vigorous in a very remarkable degree." Even the realism of the palsied head and quivering limb struck them with approval.

Yet *John Bull* (November 21) thought his conception of the part without inspiration, without the inner light of any full understanding. Only in the bustling and boisterous scenes was there any suggestion of Kean, but in the searching, subtle moments, he was at a total loss to express himself. Forrest "is put forward as *the* actor of the age; we think the station which his admirers claim for him is not his due; if a broad, sensible and intelligent personation of a part will suffice — a personation in no degree unsatisfactory to the mass — his right must be readily allowed; but if the actor is expected to go far deeper than the surface; to *conceive*, indeed, as strongly and as delicately as the author, then to do this, Mr. Forrest is unequal."

Junius Brutus Booth, with the scourge of America upon him, was now in London and was receiving quite as much inconsiderateness for his *Richard III*. Macready was watching him also, but not so intently as Forrest. He was being fed up with the latter man. Had he not been obliged to sanction with

seeming good grace a dinner to the actor at the Garrick Club? But every one irritated him by coming quickly to him with news of Forrest. The day after *Lear*, Talfourd spoke in praise of him; friends dropped in on November 22 to retail the news that Miss Mitford was asking Forrest to play "Rienzi", a new piece she was writing — and had Macready not had dispute with her over some corrections he had once asked her to make in a play for him?

Then, on November 30, Forrest played *Macbeth*, which the *Times* greeted with strictures of faulty tones of reading, but which the writer insisted had about it much to place it far above anything of current value. Macready was "amused" by the "craven parasite" who wrote the small *Times* notice. The *Post* was a flaming panegyric — Macready put it down. His diary is woeful: "O, my God! — what is this life? — what is my life? — days worn out without the least improvement of mind, without any enjoyment. . . . !" How could there be peace while Forrest was in town. There is no longer any tinge of magnanimity in his desire to have Forster be kind to the visitor. Maybe for his own comfort, he reread Forster on Forrest's *Lear* in the *Examiner* for November 6, 1836:

Mr. Forrest played *Lear* as a "foolish fond old man." He expressed weakness tolerably well; he shed an abundance of tears; he made the most of the feeble stare and the cold bewilderment of madness; and he walked about as a very old person might be supposed to walk. But this is not *Lear*, nor in any way allied with *Lear*. *Lear* is old,

but the Heavens themselves are old, and in his sublime identification of his own age with theirs, we behold the sublime analogy of his sorrows.

Forster was willing to take cognizance of Forrest's fine effects, of his rapid and convulsive passion, but could not discover a realization of the agony of heart. Forrest never reached "that vast wealth and strength of the immortal part of him, which the storm and convulsion of his disrupted affections had upturned from unconscious rest in the inner depths of his mind." Forster would drag him considerately but firmly to second place in the dramatic firmament: "He would be a most useful actor if his ambition were not so great. With some study and education, he would be found inmeasurably superior, for instance, to Mr. Vandenhoff." But now he only "mars the masterpieces of Shakespeare."

It was not until Forrest had toured the provinces and come for a return engagement to Drury Lane, February 9, 1837, that Forster saw his *Macbeth* and was further confirmed in his belief that he possessed a vulgar style. "All nice traits and distinctions are lost in it; the absolute truth and identity of a character is never thought of; everything is sacrificed to a seeking after such coarse effects as may happen to lie on the mere surface of words wrenched from the general text." In all that belongs to high imagination, Forrest is deficient. He overstresses, his despair is lusty, his stride becomes a rattling gait. This is gallery work! We have suspicion that Forster is discovering the true reason why, in the years just

past, and in those still to come, Forrest appealed to the Bowery b'hoys !

Despite these oppositions, however, Forrest was elated over his English reception. If he had listened wisely to those who were in his favor, he would have seen how "Damon and Pythias" and "The Gladiator" were deemed unworthy of his talents. But he was far too elated to hear much ; nor was there at the moment an atom of bitterness in his make-up against Macready. A little courtesy flattered him to huge heights of self-confidence. His cup was full to overflowing when the Garrick Club dinner was proposed to him. He brushed aside all possible truth in Stephen Price's report that Charles Kemble had told him Forster had declared no other man should be first actor while Macready was on the stage. An old "wives' tale" indeed of "they say."

The very idea of such a dinner had disturbed Macready. He had thought it bad taste for Stephen Price, an American, to be of the party from the Garrick Club to solicit his name for the complimentary function. There was no alternative. And so, on the nineteenth, he had gone to the affair, when, of the eighteen who had sat down to table, only Forrest, Talfourd (who was the chairman of the occasion) Blood, Price, C. Kemble, W. Jones, Zachary, Dance, Murphy, Raymond, and three others were left. His graciousness was much too evident. Talfourd, uneasy, whispered that his [Macready's] toast had already been given. But to make the atmosphere quite safe and pleasant, he repeated the toast,

and Macready records, "I briefly stated that 'the attention was unexpected; that I came to pay, not to receive, a compliment.'" How well would have fitted *Mark Antony*'s words, "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him," if only it had been so! Instead, he must bear the burden and continue the sentiment of assuring "my highly-talented friend that no one extended the hand of welcome to him more fervently or sincerely than myself, in doing which I only endeavoured to repay a small part of the debt of gratitude which had been heaped on me by the kindness of his countrymen." Charles Kemble would have the two drink together, "which we did", records Macready.

The Christmas season broke cheerless. Macready may have wanted to make it bright by an act of Christian charity. He would have Forster pay Forrest tribute in a valedictory. Sweet is it to speed the parting guest! But Forster had some of the stubbornness of John Bull about him. He would not. Nor was Macready loath to read deprecatory words against Forrest's *Virginius*. It was balm to hear some one saying that the American was growing "worse and worse." We must give Macready the credit: he may have been petty, and this pettiness undoubtedly reacted on his own work; but he was innately enough of an artist to be thoroughly dissatisfied with himself all this while. His performances were ragged, and the inroads of jealousy were making them more so.

While Forrest played in London, Macready, Van-

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denhoff, Charles Kemble, Charles Kean, and Booth were the counter-attractions. But the American was sustained in the belief that his success had been overshadowing by the fact that honors and gifts were showered upon him. He had played thirty-two nights from October 17 to December 19, and, of these, twenty-four performances had been given of *Othello* (9), *Macbeth* (7), and *King Lear* (8). Curiously, the attitude of the London press emboldened Forrest to proclaim to his mother that the cordial reception of him in those parts totally annihilated the opinion of that *clique* at home which prophesied that he would fail. How he preened himself — this sensitive, common man — over the attendance at the Garrick Club dinner “by many of the most distinguished men.” He was lauding the attentions of manager Price, who bestowed on him a rare copy of Shakespeare and a Richard’s sword, once the property of Kean; while Charles Kemble gave him two swords, one belonging to his scholarly brother, John Philip, the other to Talma. There was also presented to him an oil portrait of Garrick, and much comment was made upon his own life-size portrait as *Macbeth*, in the dagger scene, put on display at Somerset House. In addition, the members of the Drury Lane Company honored him with a golden snuff-box, tortoise-shell covered, with a mosaic lid, and on it they had inscribed a legend of sincere admiration:

To Edwin Forrest, Esq., the American tragedian, from the performers of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in testimony of their admiration of his talent as an actor,

## THE FABULOUS FORREST<sup>1</sup>

and their respect for him as a man. “His worth is warrant for his welcome hither.” — Shakespeare.

Could he not afford to give credit to what he called the dignity of the British press? They at least showed familiarity with their chief dramatist, while the critics at home were woefully ignorant! It is valuable thus to be considered in analytical comparison with other players; it makes study worth while, it repays for the agony of striving to reach that one perfection which is the only right way. So Forrest soliloquized in his letter home, that home which he still missed, despite his success, because it is beneath “the bright skies of my own free land.” In wearisome repetition comes the old song of fealty to home and mother. A sentimentalist, yet in sincerity not to be questioned.

A crucial step was now to be taken. Forrest — as we have already noted briefly — had met the Sinclair family on his first trip abroad. He had at that time called at Alfred Place and had been regaled by the very tender, romantic voice of John Sinclair, who had been a pupil of Pellegrini, Banderali, and Rossini, had sung in opera on the Continent, and was favorably known to the audiences of Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and the Adelphi. Many a drawing-room was captivated by his Scotch songs, which were rendered with a certain effeminate grace. But more struck was Forrest by his young daughter Kate, “barely nineteen”, when Wikoff was taken to call; “strikingly handsome, with engaging manners, and as intelligent as she was accomplished.” The



FORREST AS VIRGINIUS

*“The surprising strength and the ponderous grace which Mr. Forrest displayed in this character, presented to the audience the most perfect picture of a Roman hero that was ever displayed on the stage.”*

— JAMES REES



#### M R . M A C R E A D Y B E C O M E S D I S T U R B E D

father might sing with perfection, "John Anderson, my jo, John", but Forrest was otherwise intent. He was a romantic youth whose heart had been touched twice before. Maybe the faces of Jane Placide and the Riddle girl rose before him as he sat there talking. He had experienced not far off a hectic passion for a wiser, more subtle Polish Countess, but Fate had written his doom under the deceptive guise of beauty here. At midnight, Forrest and Wikoff left the Sinclair house, and confidences were exchanged on the way home. Imperiously Forrest brushed aside all suggestions that he lay court to the lady. It was out of the question, for she was of *English* birth, and he had solemnly determined to himself to wed no other than an *American* girl. At the very suggestion of Wikoff that nationality had nothing whatever to do with the grand passion, Forrest turned a deprecating gesture. The matter outwardly was dropped at the time.

But when, during the first professional visit to England, he pursued what appeared more than a passing infatuation, he seemed gradually to overcome this prejudice. The workings of human psychology are intricate, and there are no specific records to show that maybe the fact of Macready's friendship with the Sinclair family had something to do with Forrest's final decision. He and Catherine became engaged. But Forrest was doomed to be irritated at every turn; his was not the nature to countenance any customs, if he disapproved. The Sinclairs made the innocent request that a settlement be made upon

their daughter. Wikoff found Forrest fomenting and frothing eloquence at the barbarous, insulting custom. He would not accede to such a mandate. Impulsively he besought Wikoff to be his emissary to Sinclair, and give as his unshakable decision that no such marriage dower should be made. What was his should be his wife's — within reason. They must trust to his honor. This contract idea might do for the aristocracy, but not for him!

When Wikoff reached the Sinclair home, fair Catherine had been crying. Difficult indeed was friendship with Edwin Forrest; one might be called upon for any task, like intercession in this case, to spying and betraying confidences, as were to be demanded when all this potential prospect of happiness was turned to bitterness of divorce. Catherine deplored this "hateful settlement." She would "put her trust in Edwin's honor and affection." Evidently as a diplomat Wikoff was persuasive; undoubtedly the daughter's passionate love was compelling, for the parents succumbed. Probably they thought a democratic trust in honor a very curious thing. But also they realized how hopeless to withstand their child's happiness. For had she not declared, speaking of Forrest: "The first time I ever saw him, the impression he made was so instantaneous and so strong that I remember I whispered to myself, while a thrill ran through me, 'This is the handsomest man on whom my eyes have ever fallen.'" Thus always speaks the heroine of the novel of sensibility.

## M R . M A C R E A D Y B E C O M E S D I S T U R B E D

Wikoff, in his "Reminiscences of an Idler", gives details of the wedding :

In the latter part of June (1837) the marriage of Forrest took place in the church of the parish he was living in, St. Paul's, Covent Garden, which was built in 1633, and is said to contain the remains of more celebrities than any church in London, save Westminster Abbey. It was there the handsome actor, William O'Brien, married his runaway bride, Lady Susan Strongways, eldest daughter of the Earl of Ilchester. Only a limited number of the tragedian's friends were invited, as he desired to avoid anything like a sensational display. Among these were the American minister and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. John Bates, Mr. and Mrs. Dunlop, and Miss Gamble, with some others. The Rev. John Croly, the biographer of George IV., officiated.<sup>1</sup> I had the honor of figuring as Forrest's only groomsman, or, as they call it here, his "best man." I do not believe there ever was seen a handsomer couple who took each other for better or worse, than the twain who were nuptially bound together that day. Forrest was just thirty-one, and a model of manly beauty; his bride barely twenty, and neither poet nor painter ever dreamed of anything more lovely than she appeared on her bridal day. Everybody gazed on them with admiration, and declared never was seen a more beautiful pair. From the church we adjourned to the house of the bride's father, in Alfred Place, where the usual wedding breakfast was served with great luxury. The United States minister, in a felicitous speech, toasted

<sup>1</sup> Alger claims that the officiating clergyman was the poet-scholar, Reverend Henry Hart Milman, author of the popular play, "Fazio." Note that while Barrett asserts in one part of his Forrest biography that Macready was present at the ceremony, Wikoff fails here to mention him among the guests.

the happy couple, and Forrest responded in the best taste. Dr. Croly, even better known in the literary world than the church, delivered a very effective speech. . . . They looked supremely happy as they set off on their hymeneal trip, and everybody heartily wished them God-speed.

It would seem as though Wikoff was personally directing Forrest at this time; certainly he was intimately involved in all his plans and calculated on joining the young couple for a sojourn on the Continent in a fortnight from the time they left Sinclair House in their carriage-and-four. Constantly we meet with references to Forrest's diffidence, his lack of inclination to face people socially. He fought shy of a party at the American minister's home. After the actor's return to America, Wikoff was again close on his heels. Charles Ingersoll, grandson of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and Mrs. Ingersoll, whose father was envoy to France, gave a dinner in Philadelphia. Forrest was invited. He actually went as far as the Ingersoll front door, but courage failed him there, and he was turning away when Wikoff made him enter. Around the table at dinner were General Cadwalader, Nicholas Biddle, Richard Rush, Doctor Rush, and others. Forrest found himself at ease among these élite; his middle-class fear was for nothing. Wikoff reports him as having said afterwards, "This is the proudest day of my life, for I have met on terms of social equality many of the conspicuous men of my native city, whose names

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have been familiar to me from my boyhood, and whom I never aspired to know." A sad reflection, this, on Forrest's democracy!

It is a commentary on Forrest's life that nowhere can we find much of a flattering nature regarding his early married days. I have seen no letters to his family announcing the happy event, and we are assured on all sides that it was happy. He does not even mention Catherine Sinclair in the few notes written during the wedding journey. Perhaps, after all, it does take the sacrifice of many people to foster a genius, or even a near-genius. But evidently one of the surprises that awaited Forrest in the future was that he had married a wife who might rebel against the sacrifice, however much she tried to satisfy his ideas as to her feminine duties.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FORENSIC FORREST

There was nothing startlingly original in the political attitude of Edwin Forrest. All he wanted was to see a maintenance of the democratic principles which were against monopoly, against a favored class, against trade privileges. The advocates of these ideas pleaded as heatedly for them as did the Southern statesmen for the maintenance of a government policy which would leave undisturbed the economic organization of their resources and the political balance of their slave power, and which would assure to the South as just a protection of its constitutional rights as was granted to the North. Forrest was a Democrat, only once, during the last year of his life, having "split" his ticket in order to vote for a friend in the local elections. He was thoroughly in accord with the sentiments which were democratic, protecting the interests of the many against the few. His whole attitude showed him to be a product of such ideas. But, though he was inclined to accord with the Southern belief that the Constitution was made effective only through the powers granted it from the States, he was scarcely deceived — even in those days of rapidly growing sectional bitterness over the extension of slavery —

by the conviction of so many that the Constitution was a scrap of paper over which to philosophize, and the Union a compact which might be broken at the slightest sign of disagreement. When Abolitionist and Secessionist succeeded in getting what they both were working for — War — he contributed one thousand dollars to the Union cause, but he did so in no party spirit. He was not heart and soul in the Union cause as was George Henry Boker. He was prompted by the idea that the fundamentals of a government, founded by the Fathers, were threatened. He believed in the principle of State Rights, but he believed also in the preservation of the Union. He did not feel convinced, however, that it was necessary to go to war about it.

John W. Forney says that, one evening, before the war, when Forrest was among the many well-known guests who used to assemble in Washington at his rooms in the Mills House, "he did not unite with us when we sang John Brown." We learn from a newspaper that one evening after the war broke, President Lincoln, with Seward and Forney and several others, went to the theatre to see Forrest in "Richelieu."

When the grand apostrophe to the pen occurred, Mr. Forrest rose, solemnly and deliberately, facing the President's box. With pen held majestically aloft, his eyes flashing fire, the tones of that wonderful voice vibrating through the theatre, and speaking with unusual deliberation and emphasis, he gave such a rendering of Bulwer's lines as must have astonished the President.

## THE FABULOUS FORREST

“Beneath the rule of men entirely great  
The pen is mightier than the sword.  
Take away the sword.  
States can be saved without it.”

There was no gainsaying that fact that Forrest disapproved of the President’s policy. The emphasis he put into the lines was personal feeling, and he aimed his meaning pointedly at the party in the box. Lincoln and Forney whispered together, and Forrest saw the latter shake his head in disapproval. But the actor had had his political say in poetic form.

All the tendencies of the time drew Forrest within the political maelstrom; the friends he made were either themselves active participants in the political life, or were later to occupy offices of honor and power. The days of personal journalism were rife, and John W. Forney, of Pennsylvania and Washington, and Thomas Ritchie, of Richmond, were editorial writers typical of those who molded party lines and fought for party policies. One cannot associate with men of such calibre, and not catch the fever, even if one were not political-minded. Political eloquence was on the tongue. Quelling a noisy audience one night at the Arch Street Theatre, in Philadelphia, Junius Brutus Booth said pointedly, even though he was stained as the dusky *Oroonoko*, “I’ll serve you as General Jackson did; I’ll veto you!” The times impressed themselves thus closely in daily converse.

At the age of thirty-two, Forrest had made many close men friends. They had all concerned themselves mightily with his career, had chanted his

praises, had written critiques upon his work, had served — like Bryant, Halleck, Lawson, Leggett, Wetmore, and Brooks, — on his prize committees, had sought his company at stag entertainments, where he was always the life of the party. For, when he forgot his pose, when he shed the robe of tragedian, Forrest was the most genial of fellows. Have we not Forney's own word for it?

Forrest was in royal condition. He came early and stayed late. He seemed to be prepared to make everybody happy. He needed no solicitation to display his varied stores of humor and of information: sketches of foreign travel; photographs of Southern manners, alike of the master and the slave; his celebrated French criticism upon Shakespeare; his imitation of the old clergyman of Charleston, South Carolina, who, deaf himself, believed everybody else to be so.

On such occasions he would warm to the memories of Kean and Lafayette, and he would recite, in the old manner of elocution, such pieces as "The Idiot Boy." This genial streak never forsook him; the occasion brought it to the fore; or, erratically, like Kean, he would surprise a chance visitor, an interviewer, with his fine sense of mimicry — the Irish of Dennis Bulgruddy, a French priest whose original he met in Montreal, or Daddy "Jim Crow" Rice, at whose knee first piped the voice of little Joseph Jefferson, who was four years old in 1833, when he stood midget-like upon the stage, with the giant black face, and sang, "I've got a little darkey here that jumps Jim Crow."

This young man of thirty-two was selected by one of the great political organizations of the Empire State to utter sentiments regarding the great Democratic experiment which had lived through sixty-two years of adjustment. It was July 4, 1838. Forrest had shown himself alive to condition and was closely in touch with the spirit of democracy and its political representatives in government. Even when abroad on culture bent, his letters home indicated that he followed closely the political news. In Paris, he exults to Leggett over President Jackson's message regarding the French attitude toward our spoliation claims as a result of losses sustained by our vessels during the Napoleonic War. The French faced a crisis, and the American Whigs capitalized on the President's insistence that France pay the piper. Clouds of war gathered for a while. Forrest's comment shows him keenly aware of the situation :

His [the President's] energetic and manly sentiments have had the effect here of once more *Americanizing* Americans, and revived within them that love of country which the pageantry and frivolity, the dreamy and debasing luxury of this metropolis serve materially to enervate. The Chamber of Deputies has not yet recovered from the shock occasioned by the unanticipated recommendations of the message.

Thus worked the mind of the young Democrat. There were many other minds like his. They were all wedded to the ideals of the Founders. Paulding, in his play, "The Bucktails", makes *Frank*, in

a love scene, declare, "Long before I saw you, my country was my darling." Considering the significant period in which he lived, Forrest uttered oratorical platitudes.

Only eleven days after the Fourth (1838), another young man, Emerson, was to set the theologians in Cambridge, Massachusetts, agog with his Divinity School Address, and was to draw from them a renunciation of his ideas which hit hard the Puritan concept of God, and was to add more force to the Transcendentalism which Alcott and Thoreau, George Ripley, and James Freeman Clarke were so ardently supporting.

Forrest was living in an age of many "Apostles of Newness"; extreme individualism was in the air; the rise of the common man was consummate in the election of Jackson. Forrest was aflame with Jackson Democracy. There had just passed the year of great financial depression and panic, 1837, and the vested interests were seeking a way out. Corporations had raised their heads in 1830, and were reaching out to control government. Abolition, Labor, Temperance, Women's Rights were topics agitating the popular mind. It was a great era in which to make a speech. Forrest was not asked to touch on these subjects. He was merely expected by the Democratic Republican crowd to beat the tocsin of patriotism, and to praise the stand of the party as the national protector of the rights of the people against aggression. The speech was written for effective delivery. It was published the

same year, 1838, and thus may be read in all its fulsome verbiage. Charles Congdon, the journalist, called it "one of the finest pieces of calico composition ever sent to the press." With one hand Forrest extolled the virtues of the Republic; with the other, he admonished any attempt to stray from the straight road of "mutual and equal good."

New York lay sweltering under the hot sun of Independence Day, 1838. According to the news accounts, the crowds that poured into the city from the adjacent country seemed undaunted beneath the burning heat. The parade of soldiers and the firing of guns and crackers made the occasion more festive than usual. The vast Broadway Tabernacle was the centre of a Democratic celebration, and the surging people stormed the entrances with such insistence that all order was discarded, and the ticket-takers were swept from authority. So dense were the masses that women fainted and children cried out in fear. Four thousand eager persons soon filled the hall to capacity — all expectant, as they waited to hear the orator of the occasion. Edwin Forrest never had looked over such a vast audience before. Democrats and Whigs alike gave heed to what he had to say. But was it what he said so much as the manner of his saying it? Could a mere orator have held his audience as Forrest did for an hour and a half? The gallery, the ground floor, swayed to the magic of his voice; his person was properly statuesque, his sentences well-rounded and fervent. The style justified the suspicion of many that the

speech itself had been penned, or at least thoroughly gone over, by Leggett. There was no gainsaying the fact that its eloquence moved the crowd. The *Evening Post* declared the next day that "If the oration was to be delivered again, it could not fail to attract as great a multitude of hearers as at first." Surely, thought the political powers present, such congressional timber should not go to waste!

Said the *Evening Post* furthermore, in its issue of July 5, 1838 :

A discourse in which the principles of democracy were beautifully illustrated and enforced, was delivered with extraordinary grace and power of delivery, and with a voice that filled the building to its utmost extent. Mr. Forrest insisted on the necessity of constant vigilance against the abuses of legislation, which are ever encroaching on that equality of rights contemplated by our form of government; the importance of recurring to first principles, and of following them boldly out in salutary reforms; the folly of allowing the government to tamper with the trade of the country; and on various other points which make the ground of contention between the two great parties of the country, one of which seeks to maintain an equality of rights among the people, and to confine the action of the government to the simple protection of those rights, while the other labours to accumulate privileges in the hands of the few and restrictions on the rights of the many.

The *Democratic Review* for September of that year made lengthy comment on Forrest's oration. It dissected the contention that "all the religion, all

the wealth, and all the learning of the country" were with the other party, and, granting the possible truth of such a statement, reached the conclusion that in some minds the closeness of Church and State was a natural condition, since it was believed that moral fitness of the individual could not otherwise be assured. It distrusted "a free and unshackled state of mental existence, to establish and maintain that order which constitutes good civil government." The ostentatious professors of religion, this writer in the *Review* contended, who believed that only through oppression of others can their own safety be assured, are not now in the Democratic Party. Wealth wields such tyranny, hence wealth is antagonistic to the democratic principles. Therefore, it is not surprising to find, among the adherents of the other party, the intellectuals of church and finance. The fortunate thing is that the best literature is always untainted by any monarchical motive; the greatness of English literature is that it is so far removed from the political selfish despotism of England; there may have been those who "have licked the footstool of power", but the best literature always shows itself to believe in "the loftiest advocacy of freedom." Poetry, so the writer continues, is democratic; it is not the instrument of oppression. In fact, the poet has helped "swell the mighty current of democratic feeling" now spreading over the world. The interests of the masses may be jeopardized by concealment, but art is ever the friend of Democracy. Hence, it is natural that Edwin

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Forrest should be a Democrat. A long way round, and inconclusive reasoning, but a noble introductory quite consonant in style with the times. Forrest, they note, was never deceived by wealth; and he was able to roll back the clouds of venomous misrepresentation and show "in gigantic vastness and repose" the "strength of the popular cause." Here indeed is an American; in every rhythmic sentence Forrest shows "he has drunk deep of the pure and invigorating waters which flow from the fountain of American Democracy." Truly, patriotism was measured by fervor, not by strength of thought.

Alger quotes only the flowery bluster of the speech, delivered,

not to celebrate the birthday of a despot, but the birthday of a nation; not to bow down in senseless homage before a throne founded on the prostrate rights of man, but to stand erect in the conscious dignity of equal freedom and join our voices in the loud acclaim now swelling from the grateful hearts of fifteen millions of men in acknowledgment of the glorious charter of liberty our fathers this day proclaimed to the world.

Freedom against arbitrary power was our gift from Jefferson, who took the art of government from the privileged few and gave it to the many (in dangerously generalized statements, we must add). The ballot vied with the pen in power against the sword of despotism. The speech progressed in such tenor. The *Democratic Review* looked for what Forrest might say pertinent to the times. Thus the orator spoke:

Not less auspicious would be the result, if adhering closely to the avowed purposes and duties of democratic government, we should preserve an equal distance between politics and trade, confining the one to the mere protection of men in the uninfringed enjoyment of their equal rights, and leaving the other to be regulated by enterprise and competition, according to those natural principles of economic wisdom which will be ever found more just and efficient than the imperfect and arbitrary restraints of legislation. But above all, let us be careful, by no political interference with the pursuits of industry and improvement, to violate that grand maxim of equality, on which, as on its corner-stone, the fabric of democratic freedom rests. That we should frown indignantly on the first motion of an attempt to sunder one portion of the Union from the other, was the parting admonition of Washington; but with deeper solicitude, and more sedulous and constant care, should we guard against a blow being aimed, no matter how light, or by what specious pretext defended, against that great elementary principle of liberty, which once shaken, the whole structure will topple to the ground. Beware, therefore, of connecting government, as a partner or co-operator, with the affairs of trade, lest its selfish and rapacious spirit should prove stronger than the spirit of liberty, and the peculiar advantage of the votaries of traffic should be regarded more than the general and equal good of the votaries of freedom. . . .

If, in any respect, the great experiment which America has been trying before the world has failed to accomplish the true end of government — “the greatest good of the greatest number” — it is only where she herself has proved recreant to the fundamental article of her creed.

If we have not prospered to the greatest possible extent compatible with the condition of humanity, it is because we have sometimes deviated, in practice, from the sublime maxim, "that all men are created free and equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." If in no instance we have transgressed this axiom of democratic liberty, how is it that one man may freely perform what it is a crime for another to attempt? By what principle, accordant with equal rights, are the penal interdictions of the law thrown across my path, to shut me from a direction, which another may pursue without fear or hindrance? Why are a few decorated with the insignia of chartered privileges, and armed in artificial intangibility, while the many stand undistinguished in the plain exterior of the natural man, with no forged contrivance of the law to shield them from the "shocks that flesh is heir to"? Are these things consistent with the doctrine which teaches that equal protection is the sole true end of government? that its restraints should hold all with equal obligation? that its blessings, like the "gentle dews of heaven", should fall equally on the heads of all?

Immediately, the talk became rife about sending Forrest to Congress; it grew to be a subject for serious consideration and for satire. The papers took notice of him. In one column they exclaimed: "Our friend Knowles is spoken of for a seat in the Commons. Why not Forrest in Congress?" But then they raised the question, "What are we to do with his friend Leggett?" They are the two inseparables; if one has a seat, the other must at least have a stool.

If Forrest needed prompting on the questions of currency, the Northwestern Boundary, the western land interests, or on constitutional matters, Leggett should be near. Though Leggett had denied vigorously any hand in the preparation of the Fourth of July oration, nevertheless the public thus saw them in close communion. Still, the agitation for Forrest continued and culminated in an actual offer by the New York Democratic Republican Nominating Committee to run him for representative. They had intimated before the speech that it was coming, and now, even though Forrest had told them that he was pledged to his own profession, they were not deterred. Irrevocably pledged? Presumably not, for he had suggested that legislative duty required serious study and reflection, and that it would be presuming of him to keep from any one, at the present better equipped than he, the honor they would bestow upon him. But, in a few years, so he declared, he would come to the end of the time he had allotted to his profession of acting, and maybe then, through observation and rigorous preparation, he might be better equipped, should he be called to any high public trust. In these words, he declined the present nomination. In these words, he looked to the future. But he could not refrain from going into certain questions put to him by the Nominating Committee, and these are worth quoting in full from his communication, under date of Philadelphia, October 17, 1838:

The complete separation of the political affairs of the country from the private interests of trade, and especially

from those of corporate banking institutions, I regard as a consummation greatly to be desired by every friend of popular government and of the equal rights of man. I have already, on a recent public occasion, expressed my sentiments on this subject, in general terms, indeed, but with an earnestness which, in some measure, may have evinced how deeply-seated is my dread of the selfish and encroaching spirit of traffic, and of the aristocratic character and tendency of chartered monopolies, wielding, almost without responsibility, the fearful instrument of associated wealth. Not only do I approve most cordially the plan of the administration for an independent treasury, and the separation of Bank and State, but fervently do I hope that the same democratic principles of legislation may guide the action of every member of the confederacy until, at no distant day, the last link shall be sundered which now, in any portion of this republic, holds the general and equal good of the community in fatal subserviency to the sordid interests of a few.

Readers of the politics of this time will recognize in Forrest's language an intensity and similarity of purpose akin to Calhoun's own position. Van Buren had become President in 1837, as a direct result of Jackson's attitude toward the question of the United States Bank. He was Jackson's candidate; he was the first of our Presidents not born under the allegiance of the British Empire. His great problem was the wild-cat currency, the outcome of which was the panic of the year he took office. J. G. Baldwin's "Flush-times in Alabama" gives a rare picture of these shin-plaster days. During Van Buren's term, the Treasury of the United

States was founded. The Whigs had lost Calhoun; they stood for tariff, for a national bank, for consolidation. It may have been from Calhoun's speeches now that Forrest caught his ideas. Compare these words of the great Nullifier with the letter of the actor to the Democratic Nominating Committee:

I move off under the States-rights banner, and go in the direction in which I have been so long moving. I seize the opportunity thoroughly to reform the government; to bring it back to its original principles; to retrench and economize; and rigidly to enforce accountability. I shall oppose strenuously all attempts to originate a new debt; to create a national bank; to reunite the political and money powers (more dangerous than Church and State) in any form or shape; to prevent the disturbances of the compromise, which is gradually removing the last vestige of the tariff system. And, mainly, I shall use my best efforts to give an ascendancy to the great conservative principle of state sovereignty over the dangerous and despotic doctrine of consolidation.

In the course of Forrest's letter he assures the Committee that, no matter what distance separates him from his place of voting, and at whatever sacrifice of time and money, he shall come and cast his ballot for the Democracy of the Empire State, so as to help conserve those principles so vital to popular liberty and to the "permanency of our political fabric."

Thus we note the postlude to Forrest's political aspirations, as expressed to Macready. He flirted with the idea of a Congressional appointment for many years, and, during the closing period of his

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life, the suggestion was once more made to him. But each time the temptation was rejected. The question arises as to how far he was affiliated with the Tammany Organization of New York. Evidence would show that it was very remote, inasmuch as he was in two instances the victim of its underground maneuvers. Tammany was not anxious to see him a nominee for Congress; it had its own henchmen's interests to promote, and with its customary method of blackmail suggestion, proceeded, through Mike Walsh's sheet, the *Subterranean*, to stir up scandal against Forrest in 1843. This would indicate that to many Democrats Forrest was still in the field. Walsh made every effort to create party capital out of Forrest's close association with Leggett.

Political fearlessness gets no man anywhere; he must be able to practice political diplomacy, which is synonymous with political duplicity. Leggett was not that kind of man. Though he was able, at the very moment of his death, to wrench from political patronage the small office of Minister to Guatemala, he was, as the *Evening Post* said of him editorially, a brave espouser of the cause of liberty. "What he would not yield to the dictates of interest he was still less disposed to yield to the suggestions of fear." Such a man could never be befriended by the Honorable Michael Walsh. There is no book more filled with color than the "Sketches of the Speeches and Writings of Michael Walsh, Including his Poems and Correspondence", as compiled by a committee of the Spartan Association, and issued

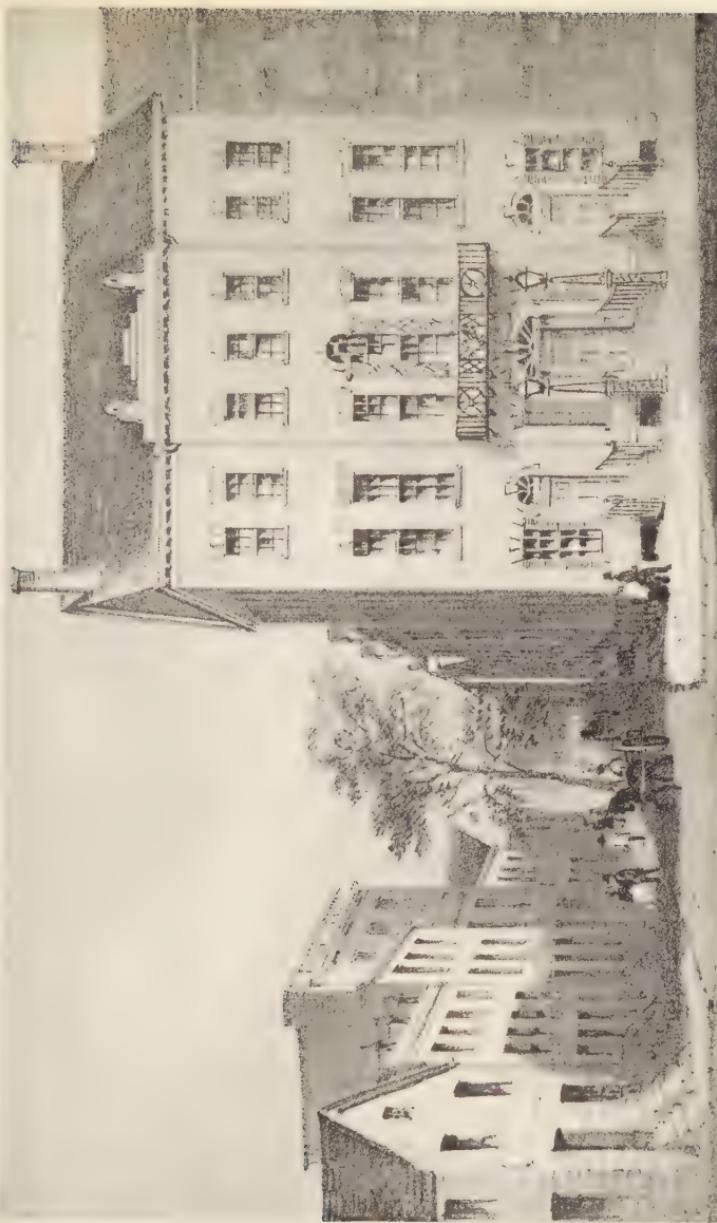
in 1843. Walsh posed as the enemy of usurpation, tyranny, oppression, monopoly, and mercenary ambition, and he caught the crowd with his fiery outspokenness. He had his passions, worshipping at the shrine of John Tyler; he had his gentler moments, as when he eloquently bemoaned the death of his friend, Francis Scott Key. But he was given to blackmail, and once was sentenced to Blackwell's Island with a friend for some offense of the kind. A comic-opera situation occurred when the two men were advised to commit suicide in the East River; one agreed to stay behind to vindicate the other, but, at the signal moment, Walsh, who was the victim decided upon for sacrifice, determined to save his own reputation. Tammany was probably a little better than Walsh. Yet Walsh had such control over the Tammany following that he won an Assembly nomination over Samuel J. Tilden, later Governor of New York and presidential candidate.

Forrest had made friends with the fiery William Leggett at the time of his memorable opening at the Bowery Theatre. Leggett was a brilliant associate of Bryant on the *Evening Post*, a stanch Democrat, with a most impeccable sense of political honesty — a quality to inspire admiration in his friends, but to bring consternation to many of his political associates. He fought long and arduously for freedom of opinion, and his fairness of attitude converted him into an ardent supporter of the Abolition movement. An impetuous man, who fought for his convictions, Leggett was the type of editor

Courtesy of the Friedenberg Galleries

TAMMANY HALL, NEW YORK, IN 1830

*The centre of political turmoil in city, state and nation.*





and friend who would have the admiration of Forrest. What he thought was right won his championship. Even at that time of ample dramatic criticism, he brought his individual likings into the pages of the *Evening Post*; three columns were nothing for a notice of "Hamlet." "Did you read my 'Jack Cade' article?" he wrote to Bryant, in 1835. "If you did, you probably supposed, from the air of historical learning, that somebody had helped me to it. It was wholly my own, but I had intended to write on that subject, and had my head full of materials freshly gathered."

The history of the writing of Conrad's drama, "Jack Cade", throws a side light on the Leggett reference, and, in turn, suggests a twist of mental jealousy which may have touched Forrest. Under the title of "Aylmere", it will be recalled, the play had been shaped for A. A. Addams, but, due to the erratic behavior of this actor, when it was played on the evening of December 9, 1835, David Ingersoll appeared in the chief rôle. We have no data to show that Forrest had his eye on this play until, in 1839, Wemyss offered to put into effect his desire to have Judge Conrad rewrite the play for the famous tragedian. Wemyss does not mention why it was that Forrest at first held him off, but we meet with a letter from Leggett, which clearly shows that Forrest was working against the Conrad play, the subject of which appealed to him.

I have been turning over the "Jack Cade" subject [writes Leggett to him] but I confess I am almost afraid

to undertake it. The theme is a grand one, and I warm when I think of it; but I must not mistake the ardor of my feelings in the sacred cause of human liberty for ability to manage the mighty subject. Besides, the prejudices and prepossessions of the world are against me, with Shakespeare on their side. Who must not feel his feebleness and insignificance when called to enter the list against such an antagonist?

He was, of course, thinking of the *Jack Cade* of the Second Part of "Henry VI."

The close comradeship existing between Forrest and Leggett was not a one-sided affair. As anxious as Forrest was to use the talents of his friend, equally as solicitous was Leggett regarding the endeavors of the player. We are prone to regard the choice of a rôle as being actuated solely by the opportunity it affords for good acting. Forrest's attractions toward *Jack Cade* were moved by the political significance of the part, its applicableness to the conditions of his own time. It was the attitude of mind of others also. Leggett writes him in the same missive which refers to *Jack Cade*:

"I hope you continue to make yourself acquainted with that insolent patrician *Coriolanus*. He was not quite so much of a democrat as you and I are; but that is no reason why we should not use him if he can do us a service."

Then, in a typically modern vein, showing not only the social conscience of Leggett (which Forrest so thoroughly admired) but — in an era of fulsome Shakespearean adulation — joining hands across the

gap of time with Tolstoy and George Bernard Shaw, Leggett adds :

I wish Shakespeare, with all his divine attributes, had only had a little of that ennobling love of equal human liberty which is now animating the hearts of true patriots all over the world, and is destined, ere long, to effect a great and glorious change in the condition of mankind. What a vast and godlike influence he might have exerted in molding the public mind and guiding the upward progress of nations, if his great genius had not been dazzled by the false glitter of aristocratic institutions, and blinded to the equal rights of the great family of man! Had I a little of his transcendent intellect, I would assert the principles of democratic freedom in a voice that should "fill the world with echoes!"

Surely there breathes in this sufficient of the same spirit that moved through Forrest's Independence Day speech, to suggest that he and Leggett talked over the matter carefully !

When Leggett died, in 1839, he was only thirty-seven years of age, yet he had made his impress on the people of his time. Through Tammany Hall's machinations, he was turned out of the Democratic Party, and Forrest shared some of the contumely which was his. Yet, through Forrest's forethought and financial backing, he was lifted over many strenuous deals, though the politicians tried to stir up discord on that score to the detriment of Forrest. The Abolitionists regarded Leggett as a knight in armor, and John Greenleaf Whittier, as is seen in an essay included in "Old Portraits and

Modern Sketches", voiced the sentiments of his friends. He wrote:

William Leggett: Let our right hand forget its cunning, when that name shall fail to awaken generous emotions, and aspirations for a higher and worthier manhood! True man, and true democrat; faithful always to liberty, following wherever she led, whether the storm beat in his face or on his back; unhesitatingly counting her enemies his own, whether in the guise of Whig monopoly and selfish expediency, or democratic servility north of Mason and Dixon's line towards democratic slaveholding south of it; poor, yet incorruptible; dependent upon party favor, as a party editor, yet risking all in condemnation of that party, when in the wrong; a man of the people, yet never stooping to flatter the people's prejudices; he is the politician, of all others, whom we would hold up to the admiration and imitation of the young men of our country.

Such sentiments as these Bryant also put into verse. To a friend like Leggett, Forrest owed much for the refining influence which intellectual stimulus always brings to the mind. In retrospect, Forrest never forgot him; nor did his friends ever dissociate the two. On the return from his second professional tour in Great Britain, among the toasts offered at the public dinner in Forrest's honor, was a silent one to the much mourned Leggett, seven years after his passing.

The cast of Forrest's political faith is thus fixed, and we only have to note his constant awareness of the trend of political policy through the years.

We find him, for instance, making a formal election bet, in 1840, to the effect that "Mr. Eastburn wagers fifty dollars that the state of Ohio will give a majority for General Harrison at the coming election." In 1856, he sent two hundred and fifty dollars to the treasurer of the Democratic Committee of Pennsylvania, of which Forney was chairman, to help defray the expenses of electing James Buchanan to the presidency. In 1862, on July 24, when Philadelphia had its enormous mass meeting in recognition of Lincoln's war policy, Forrest, absent from the city, sent his check for one thousand dollars. George Henry Boker was secretary on that occasion, and was a sort of poet laureate of the Union cause. In 1867, Forrest, the stanch Democrat, wrote to his friend, Dougherty, November 10:

The elections, as you will see by the public journals, have all gone one way pretty much — the knell of the Republican Party has rung out — the party has performed its mission. It has freed the negro — and the negro in return has shackled the party — it is left for the Democratic Party now to break the shackles of the White Man. The white man and intelligence must govern this land — there is no other way.

This was written during the ordeal of the Johnson administration, when the South was suffering under the iron hand of a military reconstruction.

These were indeed stirring times in both state and national legislatures. But it would be wrong to go into them too fully in connection with Forrest. For, after all, he was an actor, devoted to his art,

of which he wrote, on November 18, 1870, "I am still a loving student of the glorious art adorned by the genius of Shakespeare, and, in the representations of his plays, have an unfailing source of continued giving pleasure."

It is, nevertheless, a striking commentary how often the theatre and the historic men of the hour touched. I have had occasion more than once to emphasize the close interest manifested by many of the Presidents of the United States in the drama and in the players of their day. Even at this very time of which we are writing, there was being interchanged a vigorous correspondence between John Quincy Adams and James H. Hackett, which resulted in an ex-presidential pronunciamento on the character of *Hamlet*. Mr. Hackett's excellent book of "Notes, Criticisms, and Correspondence upon Shakespeare's Plays and Actors" (1863) is well worth the reading.

In this book Hackett makes some keenly discerning remarks as to Forrest. For instance, in Philadelphia, December 1, 1840, he records his impressions of this actor's *Lear*, differing much with him in his fundamental interpretation. "He and myself often and materially differ in our conceptions as well as in our tastes. . . . He exhibits too much nerve and too little flexibility of voice and countenance generally." In fact, he sacrificed fine points to impetuosity. To Hackett, passion that finds words requires temperance in acting; but Forrest did not practice reticence; he rather overdid and overstressed, even

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in the matter of "make-up." In the latter respect, Hackett criticized him for covering up with shaggy beard the useful and important muscles of his face, "making it rigid and incapable of depicting effectively the alternate lights and shades of benevolence and irascibility as they fluctuate in *Lear's* agitated mind." So he particularized, and every student of Forrest's style must needs read Hackett's book for its first-hand report upon which we have to depend in order to reach any vivid impression of the actor's scope.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE AMERICAN SILK-STOCKING GENTRY LOOK AT THE THEATRE

The era we now face has been called the “fabulous forties.” It was a decade filled with turbulence for Edwin Forrest; it witnessed the culmination of an unfortunate international embitterment, and called into play curious responses from the American public, which showed clearly how very definitely class lines were drawn, however much democracy might be lauded. Nowhere is there a more curious admixture of Puritan distrust and of aristocratic superiority than in the cultured attitude toward the theatre of this time. In fact, there has been a sad lack of understanding of the theatre through all the periods of American history, though always there has been a sneaking love for the playhouse and the play. If one went to the theatre, there was ever an apologetic excuse to be made. Yet the records show that even while lawmakers militated against the actors, legislatures repealed the edicts.

George Washington would adjust the calendar of his engagements any time for the sake of a play or a side show, yet he felt impelled, when inviting Chief Justice Jay and his Lady to the play, to leave

a loophole for their excuse: "He begs . . . that they will consider this invitation in such a point-of-view as not to feel themselves embarrassed, in the smallest degree, upon the occasion, if they have any reluctance to visiting the theatre." This was on November 30, 1789. Earlier in the year, the irascible Senator William Maclay records a similar invitation received from the Chief Executive, to witness "The School for Scandal", which to him proved "an indecent representation before ladies of character and virtue."

None the less, despite the persistent prejudice against the theatre, John Adams read the plays of Mercy Warren, John Quincy Adams kept up his spirited correspondence with James H. Hackett on Shakespeare, and wrote poetry to Ellen Tree; yet in the Adams family there looms up the flaming figure of Samuel Adams, to whom the theatre spelled anathema.

A curious shifting of the wheels of fortune is no better seen than in the case of Priscilla Cooper, who, having played *Virginia* to the *Virginius* of her illustrious father, Thomas A. Cooper, and to the *Dentatus* of Forrest, on February 17, 1834, was now, in the forties, to find herself, as the wife of Robert Tyler, First Lady of the Land at the White House for her father-in-law, President Tyler.

Among the constant theatregoers of this era were Webster and Clay, and especially of the latter are anecdotes preserved, as they touched the careers of Forrest and Macready. At one of Forney's gather-

ings in Washington, while he was Clerk of the House, Clay, referring to the Senator from Louisiana, Pierre Soulé, as a "mere actor" in his eloquence, noted Forrest standing near. To Alger, the latter said that Clay immediately offered explanation in these words: "I do not allude, Mr. Forrest, when I use the word *actor* thus demeaningly, to those men of genius who impersonate the great characters of Shakespeare and the other immortal dramatists. . . . I refer to the man who in real life affects convictions, and plays parts foreign to his soul."

I have found an interesting comparison of Forrest and Macready in Durang's "History of the Philadelphia Stage." Speaking of their impersonations of *Richelieu*, he declared that one recalled Clay while the other suggested Calhoun. Which indicates how close in resemblance were oratory and acting. In these forties, I find Forrest writing to his mother, on May 20, 1844, that he was leaving Cincinnati for Nashville, and "[I] hope during that time to visit the brave old man [Andrew Jackson] at the Hermitage, whose health I am rejoiced to hear has much improved during the last month or two. May he be spared yet to witness the downfall of the reckless party whose chief desire seems to be to benefit the few at the expense of the many." How often, in after years, was Forrest to refer to this visit, during which he casually mentioned to the old man, whose death was to occur the next year, the impending annexation of Texas. Jackson, in his administration, had warded off the ordeal, for fear of war with

Mexico; Tyler was welcoming the issue, for it meant the extension of slavery. At the Hermitage, on the mention of Texas, old age suddenly fell from Jackson's shoulders; he rose in power and sublimity; his voice thundered. Forrest, the actor, could not but note this torrential force which submerged old age. He afterwards said that Jackson gave him a great lesson in acting; into his characterization of *Richelieu* was beaten the strength of the great Kentuckian.

Macready went to Mobile, Alabama, in 1844, and put up at the Mansion House. He was soon much concerned to see the name of Henry Clay and his own together on the same playbill, as a double attraction. Who was this Clay to be pitted against him? Ludlow tried to explain, to palliate Macready's "aristocratic importance." But this scion of a strolling player "high-hatted" it in a democratic country and did not win the respect of his manager. He wished the name of Clay removed! Professionally, Macready was small. Yet only a few weeks before, on February 8, his Diary records his calling on Clay. "He seems to me to have shrunk in size, and his manners, though most kind, urbane and cheerful, have no longer the vivacity and great animal spirits that then (in 1837) accompanied them." It was in 1844 that Clay was nominated for the presidency by the Whigs.

The theatre peeps out cautiously from the literary annals of the time. The writers expected to find in all acting that stateliness which Josiah Quincy

saw in Cooper during 1826; and they attributed it to the fact that Cooper had the mind and conversation of an educated gentleman and was thus able to teach "fashionable circles" the real meaning of Shakespearean characters. Yet, withal, they looked to the theatre for "that dash of easy Bohemianism" which was frowned upon as something unstable, unreliable, to be enjoyed on the quiet, but not emulated in family life. I very much fear that Josiah Quincy regarded the play as outside the pale. In fact, pleasure was still appareled in a coating of brimstone, and when Fanny Elssler, the dancer, sailed into New York Harbor on the *Great Western*, May 3, 1840, to swallow up all the profits and to leave manager Simpson stranded, the New England moralist salved his conscience by enjoying her expression of soul through movement, rather than her dancing. Yet her costumes had to be changed slightly for the American purist, even though the talk made no difference when she visited the House of Representatives in Washington and was asked to sit in the Speaker's chair, or when she went over to the Senate, where that august body rose in her honor. During the heat of July 15, 1840, Van Buren and his Cabinet went to see her performance. She was the great sensation, brought here through the mediation of Henry Wikoff.<sup>1</sup>

The Elssler's correspondence with Madame G—— is vivacious and contains a rare impression of For-

<sup>1</sup> See the interesting Wyckoff (*sic*) letter, Havana, April 29, 1842, in Sol Smith's "Theatrical Management." 1868, p. 166.

rest, though I can find no comment of his on her, save by indirect reference, through the fatuous Alger. He is off on one of his many praises of Forrest's physique and is justifying the care of the body as a sacred duty. "Give us the soul of Channing," he writes, "purest lover and hero of God, in the body of Heenan, foremost bruiser and champion of the world [to say nothing of his relations with Adah Isaacs Menken!]; the soul of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, tender poetess of humanity, in the body of Fanny Elssler, incomparable queen of the stage; — and what marvels of intuitive perception, creative genius, irresistible authority, and redemptive conquest shall we not behold!"

While waiting for her début, Fanny was taken the rounds of the theatre — to see Charles Kean, the "clever" Charlotte Cushman, the "native tragedian", Forrest. Fanny wept on this latter occasion. She saw nobleness of mien in giant's mold. He is indeed "a fit representative of those classic heroes of antiquity, whose splendid *physique* throws the more effeminate figure of our day into ludicrous contrast." What a wonderful vocal organ, what rarity of tone! The very dome echoes with its loud reverberations; its tenderness touches the heart. "It was to his splendid acting that I paid tearful homage, and never in my life did artist inspire me with deeper admiration." She speaks of his refinement, his lifelike creations, his classic attitudes; she calls him America's Talma!

Among the many critiques on Oliver Wendell

Holmes, I find one where reference is made to his knowing "little of the theatre", though he once said through one of his small boy characters, "D'd y' ever see Ed'in Forrest play *Metamora*? Bully, I tell you!" Fanny Elssler — to Emerson her dancing was a religion — was the woman who, to Holmes, "danced the capstone on to Bunker Hill Monument as Orpheus moved rocks to music", which reference recalls that her contribution to the Bunker Hill Monument Fund caused much scandal among the bedrock Pilgrims.

At Brook Farm, Hawthorne put a picture of Elssler between Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier, a Freudian quirk which belied his previous designation of her as vile; but then, Hawthorne was not much given to hero-worship. When Boston was enthralled by Jenny Lind, he was glad to relinquish her hand at a reception to one more eager to meet her. Boston was icy to Jenny Lind, even though Longfellow called her voice "precious singing", and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in November, 1851, thrilled over the beauty of her "Bugle Song."

Yet, with Fanny Elssler; with the appearance of Lola Montez, in 1851; with the later advent of Adah Isaacs Menken (Swinburne's "The World's Delight"), America was entering the doubtful realm of risqué entertainment for which no sanction could be found in the old code. Margaret Fuller might take Emerson to see Elssler; Richard Grant White, in 1869, might praise the burlesque of Lydia Thompson and her troupe, — there was, none the less, a

prim attitude toward all art, which only made enthusiasm for "the light fantastic" the more out of place. The people could not see any of the beauty of a pirouette, but they were well versed in the age-old custom of indulging in loud disapprobation. The times designated what was the impropriety of costume; the times frowned upon the unseemly relations existing between Charles Mathews and Madame Vestris. Venus must be clothed; stories must be moral. Clyde Fitch sensed the humor of this straight-laced Americanism in "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines", when the ladies of a Moral Society called on *Madame Trentoni*, to beg her not to sing in such a scandalous opera as "Traviata."

The year preceding Macready's second visit to the United States, Charles Dickens had determined to go to America, largely prompted by a strong desire to renew his friendship with Washington Irving. This was in September, 1841. Chapman and Hall, his publishers, heartily encouraged his idea of keeping a notebook of his impressions. There is a romance alone in following his travels everywhere in the States, as detailed in W. G. Wilkins's "Charles Dickens in America." Never once, in Forster's voluminous record of the novelist, do we catch a glimpse of Forrest, which shows the extent of that critic's acrimony,—for certainly Macready must have mentioned his American rival to "Wonderful Dickens", as he called the novelist, and advised his seeing him. At the time of Forrest's first visit to London — in June, 1837 — Forster had taken

Dickens to Macready's room ; that was their first meeting and the commencement of a close friendship for thirty-three years.

The Dickens reception in America was no less than a triumph ; every one shoved and pushed to glimpse him. Committees of entertainment addressed him as they addressed Forrest in 1834, and in 1837. Every one described him, and there was no escaping identity. His American letters are as full of observation as his Notes. He invited reminiscence, whatever locality he touched. See, for instance, Edward F. Payne's "Dickens Days in Boston." In Washington, he was charmed by Clay, repelled by the feigned abstraction of Webster. He was lionized at President Tyler's levee, even though Irving, ready to depart to Spain as ambassador, shared with him the popular enthusiasm. Unfortunate time, however, for any English critic to speak the truth about American conditions ! Webster, as Secretary of State, was treating with Minister Fox over the Northeast Boundary question, and Lord Ashburton was about to come over to help settle the Maine dispute.

Then came "Martin Chuzzlewit", which appeared in its first number during January, 1843 ; the previous October 18, 1842, there was issued "American Notes." Every one suspected what would be the outcome of such frank criticism of those people whom Lord Jeffrey called "our sensitive friends beyond sea."

This onslaught upon the weaknesses of American

customs and manners, however fairly deserved it may seem to us to-day, did not at that time help to temper the growing irritation existing between the two countries. It certainly helped to fan the feelings of both Macready and Forrest, however painfully polite they were to each other during Macready's second visit. When the English actor set sail for America, Dickens was not one to see him off. He had been warned that the dedication of "Nickleby" would do Macready no good with the American public, and so the English actor was primed for trouble; he was also keen to detect in America the same faults which his friend had discovered. It is not surprising to find Macready following closely upon the social footsteps of Dickens. On this trip, he was hobnobbing with Charles Sumner, Judge Story, Emerson, Longfellow, Bryant, Prescott, and Clay. He traveled as far west as St. Louis, as far south as New Orleans — where he was followed by Forrest — as far north as Montreal; and he ended his tour in Boston, October 14, 1844. His repertory was large, and far more varied than that of Forrest. Archer gives it as including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Iago*, *Lear*, *Shylock*, *Brutus*, *Cassius*, *Benedick*, *King John*, *King Henry IV*, *Wolsey*, *Virginius*, *Tell*, *Werner*, *Marino Faliero*, *Melantius*, *Claude Melnotte*, *Richelieu*, *Lord Townley*, and *Joseph Surface*.

Ludlow preserves the receipts of Macready in Mobile, Alabama, for his 1844 engagement, as follows :

THE FABULOUS FORREST

March 4.	<i>Hamlet.</i>	\$833.75
March 5.	<i>Richelieu.</i>	\$138.00
March 6.	<i>Virginius.</i>	\$317.00
4th night.	<i>Richelieu.</i>	\$316.50
5th night.	<i>Werner.</i>	\$620.50
Monday, March 11.	<i>Macbeth.</i>	\$666.00
March 12.	<i>William Tell.</i>	\$269.00
March 13.	<i>Othello.</i>	\$475.00
March 15.	Macready benefit.	\$418.00

("A poor benefit for so celebrated an actor," says Ludlow, "I did expect \$800.")

Coming from a successful engagement at the St. Charles Theatre, in New Orleans, Forrest's Mobile engagement earned these figures :

March 18.	<i>Othello.</i>	\$528.50
March 19.	<i>Macbeth.</i>	\$330.50
March 20.	<i>King Lear.</i>	\$324.50
March 21.	<i>Metamora.</i>	\$656.00
March 22.	<i>Damon.</i>	\$319.75
March 23.	<i>Richard III.</i>	\$448.00
March 25.	<i>Jack Cade.</i>	\$413.50
March 26.	<i>Metamora.</i>	\$265.50
March 27.	<i>Gladiator.</i>	\$327.00
March 28.	<i>Jack Cade.</i>	\$185.50
March 29.	Forrest Benefit: <i>Richelieu</i> and <i>Gladiator</i>	\$573.00

Ludlow referees the game of competition with a nightly average of \$445.80 for Macready and \$397.50 for Forrest, which discrepancy displeased Forrest, who told Ludlow that he did not care to follow closely upon Macready, who drained the public

purse. But we have a record here that Forrest declared he would alternate with Macready, and even go so far as to play with him, "if they could mutually agree upon the plays to be performed." Ludlow, who was no admirer of Macready, speaks of his "affected, inflexible, and angular action", which Forrest was openly to criticize before the Edinburgh audience not many months after. As for Macready's "artiness", declared this manager, "it might have been a school of art for Englishmen, who had become used to it, — habit will do much; but to Americans, who had been looking to nature, it did seem a little odd."

Nevertheless, the villainous comparisons pursued Macready and Forrest, and we take the story up in the pages of Sol Smith. The season in St. Louis, beginning April 9, 1844, with Macready's *Hamlet*, was disastrous for the management's pockets, "emptying them as effectually as *Macbeth's* daggers emptied the body of *King Duncan* of its blood." In Cincinnati, the receipts for Macready, \$721, \$292, \$430, \$377, \$295, \$406, or six nights, \$2,525, averaged nightly, \$422, half of which went to Macready; and \$366, \$286, \$142, \$135, \$207, \$426, \$175, \$422, \$140, \$241, \$426, or eleven nights, \$2,960, averaged nightly \$269, half of which Forrest drew. The star system was disastrous, as terms were then set by the headliners. Though we find many notices of Macready's lack of drawing power, we are told by Archer that the profits from this second visit totalled about £5,500.

Do we find any condescension on Macready's part during this visit? In a letter to Sol Smith, dated June 3, 1844, he disclaims any intention of "cutting" manager Caldwell, either in London or New Orleans, and gives a long disquisition on courtesy and manners. "I bowed to him in England," writes the conscious Chesterfield, "as I should to any gentleman I had only professionally known for a few weeks, after the lapse of so many years. *You know* I do not carry the 'hail fellow well met' address of a greenroom into my circle of acquaintance, and *that disappoints* and *annoys many actors*, and has *been one great means* of sending to you the lessons you had been taught of me."

From now on Macready's Diaries become his confessional; we look therein to find the shallowness of the man, his snap judgments, based on the humors of the moment — for a good dinner, good company, and adulation go a great way with him. At first, on October 23, 1843, he has Miss Cushman as his *Lady Macbeth*, and though he notes that she has much to learn in her art, she at least "showed mind and sympathy with me." But soon he is exhibiting smallness toward the actress, as she became surer of herself and more recognized as his equal in the starring venture. By December 27, 1843, he is writing, "Letter from Miss Cushman — oh! I do not like thee, Dr. Fell!"

He really does n't know his own mind — cannot consistently keep pace with his own fleeting emotions, measured by the thought of how much others might

be detracting from his own importance. More and more the consuming measure of his own worth over-clouds any real discernment he may have had. He is the snob toward Miss Cushman. "She kissed my hand," he confesses, November 23, 1843, "but I was only kind." And, on December 5, he admonishes her for her "want of energy and purpose in studying her art." Thus he dispensed sparingly his praise and interest; thus he disposed intolerantly his blame and censure. In October, 1843, while Forrest was dining him amidst his usual coterie of friends, Macready is flattered and disposed to be good-humored. He writes, "I like all I see of Forrest very much. He appears a clear-headed, honest, kind man; what can be better?" A good question, Mr. Macready, for you to answer. But later, on October 28, after being surfeited by comparisons of their two *Macbeths*, he says imperiously, "*He is not an artist.* Let him be an American actor — and a great American actor — but keep on this side of the Atlantic, and no one will gainsay his comparative excellence." A dead give-away, Mr. Macready, for which you should have been heartily ashamed!

All this time, during the first months of his engagement, he is seeing much of the Forrests, husband and wife. He had been a friend of the Sinclairs, and maybe Catherine glimpsed the byplay of the rising tide of jealous competition, steering a middle course which was pleasant for Macready, though galling to Forrest. Somewhere, in a theatre scrapbook, may

be the daguerreotype mentioned in the following note from Macready to Forrest: "Should you be disengaged tomorrow, Thursday, at 12 o'clock, I shall be very happy to be daguerreotyped in your company."

The two were trying to do the impossible thing — maintain the semblance of a friendship, while feeling a fundamental contempt for each other's work. In the midst of partaking of hospitality, of associating with Longfellow and others, Macready "looked for the eaters with knives, but detected none." In the midst of rehearsals, he becomes slack, for he understands these Americans are best pleased with exaggeration rather than with refinement. As he sits chatting with Emerson, as he calls on Sumner, as he dines with Felton, Jared Sparks, the Storys, and others, did he hear much that was derogatory to Forrest? How could the latter ever be a great actor in an atmosphere inimical to fine art? Forrest's adherents were liberal to extravagance because he was home-bred, and the vulgar people Macready saw were content, in *Lear*, to have Forrest play the trash of Tate's version rather than the original of Shakespeare; this "manifests the extent of his genius", sneers Macready.

But all this consuming intensity did not stop the outward amenities. Mrs. Macready, at home, writes Forrest an appreciative note about his cordial entertainment of her husband. It is dated November 3, 1844:

Nothing has given me greater pleasure from America than that which the relation of the hospitality and kind-

## THE AMERICAN SILK-STOCKING GENTRY

ness Mr. Macready has received from you, during his sojourn in New York, has communicated. I only wish I had any means here of testifying my gratitude to you, for your great attention to him; which has gratified him very much, and which is one of the delightful things among the many, he will have to reflect upon, in remembering his visit to your great country.

But probably Macready caught some of his overbearing scorn from the aloof attitude of that part of the American public, often called in the press the "Silk-stockings Gentry", which would do honor to Forrest without socially recognizing him. In January, we find Macready calling N. P. Willis a miserable reptile, a pitiable person, because he reports the English actor's lack of drawing power. There is no doubt that, deep down beneath these petty characteristics, Macready was mentally alert and showed a natural taste. Amidst the wild scenery of the Alabama River, on his way from Montgomery to Mobile, he is reading Bulwer's "The Last of the Barons." Again, in Philadelphia, he is reading Wordsworth for voice culture. If Forrest had only been, in a small proportion, as zealous of his training! But he never was.

Yet, whenever one is most prone to enjoy Macready through his Diaries, he suddenly shows his weak colors. He sneers, "These players!" when one poor underling withstood his peremptory correction. Again, "An American editor is a creature *per se*—agh." In New York, September 16, the entry occurs: "Acted *Hamlet*, in *defiance* of the

dullest audience I ever almost encountered. I believe I acted *really* well — utterly unaided by the audience. Was called for and went on. The heat was very great, and the shouts of the democrats at their mass meeting were heard distinctly through the play.” This was the exciting year of 1844, when Clay was the Whig candidate for President, and Polk was the first “dark horse” to get the election as a surprise to the Democrats.

It is a coincidence to find Macready fulminating against Willis for his belief that Forrest’s *Richelieu* was superior to his, just as Forrest previously, and later, was to rage over the unfairness of Forster. Everywhere Macready moved, during this trip, he heard tales of Forrest being set in opposition to him. Now he plays the same night as Forrest in *Richelieu*; again he hears that Forrest is to appear as *Hamlet* in order to court comparison with him. With what villainous relief he exclaims, when he notes that the American Dane drew a house of only \$200, at the Walnut, “If it be so, he is justly punished for his ungentlemanly conduct.” Yet even such feeling does not deter Macready from sitting a while with Mrs. Forrest, “whom I like as pretty and amiable.” Alas! can it be true he never knew her at the Sinclair home, or attended the Forrest wedding, or is this merely one of his superior whims? Disquieting news is in his ears. Miss Faucit has engaged for Paris, and Forrest resolves to go there too. The time is fast approaching, Mr. Macready, when all the camouflage must be thrown aside, and the battle of

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jealousies be declared to the full. No more walks with Forrest up Fifth Avenue to the old Reservoir, now Forty-second Street, in New York; no more exulting in private over Forrest's failure. Open war to the hilt, with demeanor on both sides befitting much lesser men. Macready was back home in October, 1844.

## CHAPTER X

### MR. FORREST'S LITTLE TEMPER: "LET HIM DO HIS SPITE"

It was an unfortunate circumstance that Forrest's second professional tour of Great Britain should have begun so close upon the return home of Macready. The latter had accepted an offer to play in Paris under manager Mitchell and had begun his engagement there, supported by Miss Helen Faucit, on December 16, 1844, at the Théâtre Italian, as *Othello*, and had followed it with *Hamlet*, *Virginius*, and *Macbeth*. Such critics as Théophile Gautier and Janin were warm in praise of the English company, and George Sand, Alexandre Dumas, Eugène Sue, and others gave additional testimony of their regard. Miss Faucit had detected in Macready, since his return from America, an overbearing attitude, an irritability, a jealousy, and a resentment over the fact that she had won the good will of the French public.

Consider, therefore, that Forrest was once more in London, opening at the Princess's Theatre on February 17, 1845, in "Othello", and that there was even more cause than ever for Macready's dour mood. Feelings had now reached a hyper-

sensitive condition. Forrest was thoroughly convinced that, whatever favorable opinion had been held of Macready during his recent visit to America, was largely due to the serious suspicion that the American press was dominated by a set of *English* editors; Macready was equally assured that, whatever unfavorable notices were given him, had been marshalled by Forrest. Macready's biographer, William Archer, is frank to own that Forrest was dealt with unfairly by Forster, on this second trip, and it is certain that, among his friends, including Bulwer-Lytton, Macready had told his own version of the rising tide of feeling and had won their sympathy.

When, on his opening night, the American actor was greeted by hisses; when, from several parts of the house, came concerted evidences of disfavor from the hands of an organized clique, then Forrest began to ponder over the ill done him. His *Macbeth* was in like manner hissed, but the greater part of the audience upheld him, and we are told that the remainder of his London time passed quietly. The press fulminated, and Forrest brooded, and his temper fed upon abuse until his whole outlook was jaundiced. Was it a systematic plan to ruin his engagement? Were Forster and others of Macready's friends the arch fiends in this plan? They laughed at his *Macbeth*, his *Lear*, calling one a caricature, the other a "roaring pantaloon." Yet, even Alger is forced to declare that the critical sum total of opinion in London was favorable; the

*Athenaeum* discovered in his *Macbeth* a conception mellowed by experience; the *Sun* thought his *Lear* every inch "an old oak tottering to its fall"; the *Times* saw in his conception of *Lear* masterly design, though his appearance might at first belie the impression; *John Bull*, reviewing his *Othello*, declared it more chaste than heretofore.

From this same impression, Alger turns to such bitter outbursts as this by the writer for the *Observer*, discussing *Metamora*:

His whole dramatic existence is a spasm of rage and hatred, and his whole stage life one continuous series of murder, arson, and destruction to life and property in its most hideous form. What a pity he could not be let loose upon the drab-colored swindlers of Pennsylvania! Mr. Forrest did not indicate one of the characteristics of the American Indian except that wretched combination of sounds between a whine, a howl, and a gobble, which is designated the war-whoop by those who think more of poetry than of truth.

One is not likely to demur from this opinion, even if only the fragments of the play are read!

Would these Americans never cease bothering Macready? London was having nothing but first nights of these so-called first-rate stars. Had n't Charlotte Cushman made her bow as *Bianca* on February 14, 1845? And had she not taken the town by storm? So well disposed were they toward her that when, at the Haymarket Theatre, she played *Romeo* to the *Juliet* of her sister, Susan (December 30, 1845), they hailed it as a creation,

and Sheridan Knowles declared her delineation to be the topmost passion! All of which Macready treats with ominous silence in his "Diaries", though he was as cordial to Charlotte Cushman as he ever could be to any actor who disturbed his horizon. Walt Whitman had declared, on August 14, 1846, when he saw the British opinion that she was a second Siddons, "Charlotte Cushman is *no* 'second Siddons'; she is *herself*, and that is far, far better." Then, after the fashion of the American on the defensive, he added: "We don't know how others may think; but we consider it a shame that such a woman as Charlotte Cushman should ever have been allowed to be superseded by the fifth-rate artistic (?) trash that comes over to us from the Old World."

No wonder, on February 23 (1845), we note Macready writing in his telltale Diary that while he sorrows over Forrest's utter failure in *Macbeth* ("without wishing him *great* success"), he is more sorry for his wife! The farce continues, when he called on the Forrests and heard the tragedian discuss his plans to go to Paris, "where he would be 'better appreciated than he is here'", to which Macready, approaching his fifty-second year of wisdom on the morrow, March 3, exclaims, "I fancy *not!*" Every one seems ungrateful now to Macready, and inferior—he is belittling Miss Faust because he is jealous of her. The drama is in a low state, the theatre is tottering on the verge of mediocrity, and he is unappreciated. Unhappy Macready!

Strange inconsistency of the man at this time that he should be contemplating a removal to America!

Thus far a fair verdict would say that the balance of favor in this growing farce belonged to Forrest. The latter had not yet begun making his puerile speeches of justification, or writing to the papers his ill-tempered and unconvincing letters of explanation of his bad manners and ungovernable temper.

Now occurred two incidents which helped to aggravate the situation still more. Forrest was intent on invading Paris, for he had worshipped Talma. One day, during his 1834 trip, he had gone to a Parisian theatre, at the request of a manager, to render judgment upon a young man of supposed merit. "He will never rise above mediocrity," declared Forrest, "but that scrawny, Jewish girl will be one of France's glories." It was Rachel whose greatness he had predicted! Now he wanted himself to act in Paris. Speaking of how welcome he would be to the French public, one of the current journals expatiated on his importance and his sympathetic point of view. It said:

*Il est l'un des tribuns les plus éloquents du parti démocrate, et il a été un moment question de le nommer représentant du peuple au congrès. Il a donc toute espèce de titres à une réception brillante et digne de lui de la part du peuple parisien, si hospitalier à toutes les gloires. A ses titres nombreux à cette hospitalité, M. Forrest en a ajouté un encore, s'il est possible, par la manière honorable et cordiale dont il a parlé de la France dans le discours d'adieu qu'il a adressé l'autre jour aux habitants de Philadelphie.*

What had he said? I quote from the French source:

*Pendant le voyage que je vais faire à l'étranger, je me propose de donner quelques représentations dans la capitale de la France, où je recevrai, je n'en doute pas, l'accueil le plus bienveillant et le plus cordial. Je crois que je ne hasarde rien en osant tant espérer. Je parle d'après ma connaissance personnelle du peuple français, au sein duquel je sais qu'un Américain est toujours bien venu. Un Américain se souvient avec gratitude que la France a été l'alliée, l'amie de son pays, dans la guerre de son indépendance, et la nation française n'a point oublié que c'est à l'exemple de l'Amérique qu'elle doit son initiation à la grande cause de la liberté humaine.*

He recalled now his early pleasure in Paris as a young man, enthralled by the varied color and movement of life in the streets. He was visiting the theatres: the Théâtre Porte St. Martin, where Mlle. Georges, in Hugo's "Lucrece Borgia", was holding him by her grandeur, her dignity, her flexible expressiveness. And, after seeing her, he was exclaiming against the English school which so surfeited the American stage.

"How different is her and nature's style," he wrote home, in 1834, "from the sickly abortions of the present English school . . . the snake-like writhing and contortion of body, the rolling and straining of the eye-balls till they squint, the shuffling gait, and the whining monotone." Was he blind to the presence of similar characteristics in his own work? He was recognizing in Mlle. Mars, of the

Théâtre Français, evidences that the genius of comedy belongs exclusively to the French stage.

Holding these feelings, it is natural that Forrest should desire to go to Paris professionally, and all the more so since his rival was there before him. John Mitchell, managing the English company in Paris, was written to. Archer claims that, "oddly enough", Mitchell refused to see him. But was it "oddly enough"? Recall Macready's exclamation over the very idea of Paris for Forrest. It is not unreasonable to believe that some professional politics were played. Yet John Mitchell emphatically denied, in a letter to Macready, December 14, 1848, that he acted on any other than his own managerial judgment.

Another irritating disappointment confronted Forrest in his inability to give before the London public his performances of the *Cardinal*, in "Richelieu" and *Claude Melnotte*, in "The Lady of Lyons." He wrote to Bulwer on the subject, and, after undue delay, received from him the following curt note:

March 4th, 1845.

Sir:— I regret that, having invariably declined to allow the representation of my plays, nightly, at any metropolitan theatre, I cannot comply with your request. I could not allow "Richelieu" and "The Lady of Lyons" to be performed for a less period than ten nights each, *upon a payment beforehand of fifty guineas for the two*, and supposing that the twenty performances were included within five weeks — at which time the right of performance (supposing that accident prevented the completing

the twenty representations) would cease — and return entirely at my disposal.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

E. L. Bulwer.

When, in 1848, matters were converging toward a lawsuit, which Macready was contemplating against Forrest, Bulwer most emphatically denied that, in any way, was he prompted by others to refuse Forrest the two plays desired. Under date of December 16, 1848, he avowed :

According to the printed statement from the *Boston Mail*, October 30th, it seems that I did accord to Mr. Forrest the permission to act the parts of *Richelieu* and *Claude Melnotte* for a less sum than I was, and still am, in the habit of receiving for them at a London Theatre; and a less sum than I should have asked from any manager, with whom you yourself were engaged — viz., 80 guineas for 40 nights; that is, for a full season. My usual terms would be 100 guineas; and you know well, that my reason for claiming pecuniary terms for the performance of my plays — no matter who the actor — is, to set the example of enforcing my own act of Parliament, for the benefit of poorer dramatic authors than myself.

More of this in its logical place.

In the meantime, news reached home, from Forrest and from the English papers, regarding British treatment of the American tragedian. An outburst on "Mr. Forrest's Second Reception in England" appeared in the *Democratic Review* for April, 1845. They claimed that every bit as oak-ribbed in strength as Webster, Forrest is —

struck out of the very heart of the soil, and vindicating himself too clearly to be misunderstood, as a creature of its institutions, habits, and daily life. His biography is a chapter in the life of the country; and taking him at the start, as he appears on the Bowery stage (a rugged, heady, self-cultured mass of strength and energy, thrown down in the most characteristic spot of the American Metropolis), and running on with him through all his career; in the course of which, it became necessary for him, more than once, to take society by the broad-cloth collar which it itches to put on even here, to shake it into good behavior; down to the day when he brought to his brass-buttoned coat, and set out for this second expedition to Europe; we shall find him American every inch; the growth of the place, its representative in the acted drama; and well entitled to make a stir among the smooth proprieties of the Princess's Theatre.

Strange that there should come back home news that Forrest had lost his vigor in a new refinement of style! The writer in the *Democratic Review* resents any suggestion that muscle, energy and power were shorn from him. What would Forrest be without these! Of Macready, kind words are spoken, though he is recognized as lacking in human heart. Forrest moves the emotions because he is a man above the actor. In him there is "no painted shadow", "no piece of costume." He is

a man, there to do his four hours' work: brawinely [*sic*] it may be, sturdily, and with great outlay of muscular power, but there's a big heart thrown in; and if you fail to be moved, you may reasonably doubt whether sophistication has not taken the soul out of you.

Here is a representative democrat on a large scale — bold, gothic — who has “shot up like the wild mountain pine and prairie sycamore.” Forrest and Cushman — the hope of the Drama in America! Rah, rah, rah!

It would have been well had Forrest not toured the English provinces at this time, for, even though he had brooded upon the injustice done him, until every one was brought under suspicion, so far he had done little and said less, and so his position at least was more tenable than that of Macready.

But he did go, and met with great success in Sheffield. Here it was he played *Othello* to the *Iago* of Gustavus V. Brooke, an actor whose stentorian voice kept pace with that of the American tragedian. It was he who addressed Forrest for the Sheffield Theatre Company, presenting him with a silver snuff-box, inscribed, “Presented to Edwin Forrest, Esq., by the members of the Sheffield Theatrical Company, as a mark of their esteem for him as an ACTOR and a MAN. January 30, 1846.” They told him, through Brooke, of the pleasure they had had in witnessing his wonderful talents; they lauded him for his courteous behavior to his fellow players. Their feelings of cordial wishes are sincere, says Brooke, both for Forrest and his wife. To which Forrest remarks, warmed by a rush of eloquence: no greater pleasure to him than to be praised by his fellow workers. The way had been laborious for him to the heights. And merely because the heights were attained — there was no doubt as to the

heights in Forrest's mind — was no reason why he should forget that those not so high are in need of praise and precept. A very moral speech indeed and well meant. "These . . . courtesies shown to one another are productive of a vast amount of good," he said.

In Sheffield, too, Forrest spoke at a banquet, honoring the birthday of Robert Burns, and in response to a toast to him and the American dramatist he spoke of his Scotch inheritance, of his early days when his father and the American ornithologist, Wilson — both Scotch emigrants — taught him the poetry of the poet of the Scottish Hills. Another sweep of sincere feeling came over him, as he recited the lines written by his dear friend, Fitz-Greene Halleck,

". . . His words are driven,  
Like flower-seeds by the far winds sown."

Forrest was in good mood, and all was going well. The *Manchester Guardian* liked his *Spartacus*; the critic was discriminating and expressed his regret that Forrest was still prone to strut, to depict deeper passions by muscular exertion, shoutings and hoarse ravings. But no one, seeing him, could discount his extraordinary histrionic picture.

In Cork, Belfast, and Dublin the patriotic outbursts in "Jack Cade" against tyranny pleased the audiences immensely. Was not this indeed the nation to treasure the denunciations of oppression? They chanted Forrest's praise in newspaper criticism and poetry; he paid them compliments in curtain



*Courtesy of the Harvard College Library*

A CARTOON OF FORREST AS SPARTACUS

*"Well, he was tall and he was muscular. Such calves as his I have seldom seen."*

— CHARLES T. CONGDON



speeches. But, even in the midst of all the success which took from the bitter sting of London worries and disappointments, Forrest, on the surface, was always ready to declare his true resentful colors. One evening, in Dublin, when billed for "Damon and Pythias", the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland entered the theatre with all the pomp and circumstance of his position. Forrest frowned upon the vice-regal impositions; they stirred his heart to contempt. He showed it by utterly ignoring — either by look or gesture — the presence of this "proxy rule." The Democrat was no sycophant!

Then arrived the hour of misfortune. Forrest was in Edinburgh, and so was Macready. The latter was playing *Hamlet*, and Forrest, in a box, was among the spectators. It was March, 1846 — and while not the Ides, just as unfortunate in Forrest's life. Says Macready (under date, March 2), re-viewing himself, in characteristic attempt to be penetratingly self-critical, — "Acted *Hamlet* really with particular care, energy and discrimination." He thought it the best performance of the Dane he had ever given. Yet some one dared to hiss him at his waving of a handkerchief before the play scene — some one hissed, and "I bowed derisively and contemptuously to the individual!" Who was he? Some bore positive testimony that it was not Forrest; others declared it could be no other than he. "I feel glad it was not an Englishman," exclaims Macready on the fourth. The guilt is on Forrest. "The low-minded ruffian! That man would commit

a murder, *if he dare.*" Like banners suddenly unfurled, the fight came into the open. Pent-up feeling became bitter warfare.

No question, unless it be that of "Who killed Cock Robin?" was more vigorously argued back and forth than that of "Did Forrest hiss Macready?" No matter whether or not in theory he had justification or provocation, did he actually do it? Macready was somewhat kept in doubt; conflicting reports reached him. But the *Scotsman* laid the blame squarely on Forrest, and to Macready was brought the strange news that the irate American had faced one of the supposed editors of the august journal with the threat that, if he wrote the defamatory item, he was indeed a blackguard, and he, Forrest, would give him the kicking he deserved. Then the *Chronicle* declared Forrest's admission of the act, and his attempt to justify himself. In fact, even so late as March 14, 1846, the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle* declared: "On Monday he (Macready) personated *Hamlet*, when he again introduced the *pas de mouchoir*. A few injudicious admirers attempted to applaud the harlequinade, which elicited hisses from so many of the audience that we fear our contemporary, the *Scotsman*, will be unable to enjoy the satisfaction of individually stigmatizing the offenders." A satiric thrust at all parties who held Forrest to blame! Macready was brought more news that, not content with the mild sensation he had created on March 2, two nights after, Forrest had occupied one of the boxes and had given vent

to low talking during all the chief scenes in which Macready was on the stage. There was not the protest Macready would have liked to see against the wretch. He was beginning to realize that he was not a favorite in Edinburgh. Then came Forrest's Letter in the London *Times*:

Sir: Having seen in your journal, of the 12th inst., an article headed "Professional Jealousy", a part of which originally appeared in *The Scotsman*, published in Edinburgh, I beg leave, through the medium of your columns, to state that, at the time of its publication, I addressed a letter to the editor of *The Scotsman* upon the subject, which, as I then was in Dumfries, I sent to a friend in Edinburgh, requesting him to obtain its insertion; but, as I was informed *The Scotsman* refused to receive any communication upon the subject, I need say nothing of the injustice of this refusal. Here, then, I was disposed to let the matter rest, as upon more mature reflection I did not deem it worth further attention; but now, as the matter has assumed a "questionable shape", by the appearance of the article in your journal, I feel called upon, though reluctantly, to answer it.

There are two legitimate modes of evincing approbation and disapprobation in the theatre, — one expressive of approval, by the clapping of hands, and the other by hisses to mark dissent; and, as well-timed and hearty applause is the just meed of the actor who deserves well, so also is hissing a salutary and wholesome corrective of the abuses of the stage; and it was against one of these abuses that *my* dissent was expressed, and not, as it was stated, "with a view of expressing his (my) disapproval of the manner in which Mr. Macready gave effect to a

particular passage." The truth is, Mr. Macready thought fit to introduce a fancy dance into his performance of "Hamlet", which I thought, and still think, a desecration of the scene, and at which I evinced that disapprobation, for which the pseudo-critic is pleased to term me an "offender"; and this was the only time during the performance that I did so, although the writer evidently seeks, in the article alluded to, to convey a different impression. It must be observed, also, that I was by no means "solitary" in this expression of opinion.

That a man may manifest his pleasure or displeasure after the recognized mode, according to the best of his judgment, actuated by proper motives, and for justifiable ends, is a right which, until now, I have never once heard questioned; and I contend that right extends equally to an actor, in his capacity as a spectator, as to any other man. Besides, from the nature of his studies, he is much more competent to judge of a theatrical performance than any *soi-disant* critic who has never himself been an actor.

The writer of the article in *The Scotsman*, who has most unwarrantably singled me out for public animadversion, has carefully omitted to notice the fact that I warmly applauded several points of Mr. Macready's performance; and more than once I regretted that the audience did not second me in so doing.

As to the pitiful charge of "professional jealousy" preferred against me, I dismiss it with the contempt it merits, confidently relying upon all those of the profession with whom I have been associated, for a refutation of the slander.

Yours respectfully,

Edwin Forrest.<sup>1</sup>

March, 1846.

<sup>1</sup> See James H. Hackett's statement as to Macready's unwarranted interpretation. Reproduced in Wemyss's "Theatrical Biography." 1848, p. 311.

In spite of all that may be said in justification of some means of showing disapproval in the theatre, Forrest resorted to the lowest form of criticism. I recall Charles Lamb's letter to Manning (February 26, 1808), in which he said :

Damn 'em, how they hissed ! It was not a hiss neither, but a sort of a frantic yell, . . . like bears, mows and mops like apes, sometimes snakes, that hissed me into madness. 'T was like St. Anthony's temptations. Mercy on us, that God should give his favourite children, men, mouths to speak with, to discourse rationally, to promise smoothly, to flatter agreeably, to encourage warmly, to counsel wisely, to sing with, to drink with, and to kiss with, and that they should turn them into mouths of adders, bears, wolves, hyenas, and whistle like tempests, and emit breath through them like distillations of aspic poison, to asperse and vilify the innocent labours of their fellow-creatures who are desirous to please them !

This letter was the source of his inimitable essay, "On the Custom of Hissing at the Theatre."

For his behavior, therefore, Forrest was justly scored by the London press and by the New York *Herald* — the latter taking, however, too eager a satisfaction in showing him up. Whether or not Forrest had reason to be dissatisfied with Macready's *Hamlet* is another question. He said frankly that he showed dislike of only a few points. We find a first-hand account of the puerile affair in John Coleman's "Plays and Playwrights." Coleman placed Forrest's *Othello* above that of Salvini. As for Forrest's *Gladiator* he said : "My mind does not

enable me to conceive anything more superbly symmetrical or perfectly majestic than this man in this part." In Coleman's opinion, "He had endeared himself to every member of the company by his modesty, his manliness, and his courtesy. Our manager alone was systematically hostile or disdainfully unsympathetic."

Now what, asks Coleman, did Forrest see in Macready as *Hamlet*?

He wore a dress, the waist of which nearly reached his arms; a hat with a sable plume big enough to cover a hearse; a pair of black silk gloves, much too large for him; a ballet shirt of straw-coloured satin, which looked simply dirty; and, what with his gaunt, awkward, angular figure, his grizzled hair, his dark beard close shaven to his square jaws, yet unsoftened by a trace of pigment, his irregular features, his queer, extraordinary nose — unlike anything else in the shape of a nose I have ever seen — and his long skinny neck, he appeared positively hideous.

Yet, with all this against him, Coleman confesses that, when he come to speak the lines, Macready "illumined, irradiated the atmosphere." It would seem that in the play scene, wherein *Hamlet* hopes to catch the conscience of the *King*, the young Dane had just said to *Horatio*:

"They are coming to the play; I must be idle.  
Get you a place, —"

when he gave a most astounding pirouette, flicking his handkerchief in coquettish flourishes more nearly

in accord with *Le Beau* or *Sir Andrew Aguecheek* than *Hamlet*. And it was this contretemps which was greeted by a hiss from Forrest. Coleman witnessed the act. He writes :

At this moment, from the Students' Gallery (which was separated from the upper boxes only by some interfoliated iron-work) a cry arose of "Turn him out!" I can see him now. The square brow, the noble, majestic head, the dark eyes flashing fire, the pallor of the white face, enhanced by his blue-black beard, which contrasted strangely with his turned-down white collar (an unusual mode of wearing the collar at that time), his jaw set like a bull-dog's, his arms folded on his broad chest. As he rose and faced his would-be assailants, he looked exactly as he used to look in "*The Gladiator*", when he said, "Let them come; we are prepared!"

And what was the effect of this coarse, angry outburst of Forrest's?

The people on the other side of the screen absolutely recoiled, as if they expected some king of the forest to leap from his iron den amongst them; they then concluded to let the American alone. On the stage the actors were at a standstill; in the auditorium the multitude were awed into silence. After a short pause, I suppose the man's better nature prevailed, for Edwin Forrest slowly turned away, and left the house.

So much for this opera bouffe, ill-mannered and melodramatic. Was Mrs. Forrest present? For Macready was her friend and, in addition, he was her countryman. This must have always been an

irritant to Forrest's soul, especially in view of the dire catastrophe which lay ahead of him. On the other hand, if Coleman, as a spectator, is to be believed, then his statement that others did not hiss contradicts those who would have represented the scene as a carnage of disfavor on every hand.

With his customary quick change of front to suit the occasion, Macready now hurled invectives against a country which could produce such a man as Forrest. He says, on March 27, 1846: "I feel I cannot *stomach* the United States as a nation; the good there, I must admit, appears like the quantity of the grains of wheat to the bushel of chaff." And much later, November 16, after he reads of the dinner given to Forrest in New York, he exclaims: "America!! Give me a crust in England." Thus vanish into thin air any plans he may have had to locate permanently in the United States.

Meanwhile, Forrest finished his professional engagements, and on July 4 presided in London, at the Lyceum Tavern, over an Independence Day Celebration. He also made the acquaintance of Jerome Bonaparte, with whom he talked of Talma. Of the rest of his stay abroad, there are no records, nothing to indicate the feelings of Catherine Sinclair. But, though the symptoms of unhappiness were not yet apparent between her and her husband, it is safe to calculate that Forrest's behavior did not serve to bring them any closer together. The poor man — for he was to be pitied when governed by his ungovernable passions — turned homeward in

August, bitterness in his heart against Great Britain in general and Macready in particular. He brooded and did not even have the outlet of a diary through which to vent his feelings. Would that he had kept such a record !

## CHAPTER XI

### THE DEADLY LUXURY OF HISSING

Four days after Forrest's arrival home, he was greeted at the Park Theatre, in New York, by an enthusiastic crowd. He played *Lear*, which, asserted the New York *Mirror*, was a delineation no one could witness "without elevation and purification of character." Amidst rousing cheers, he was brought before the curtain to give thanks. Every one saw in him marked improvement, and they attributed the change to certain refinements which he had acquired abroad. "His action and attitudes are more classic in their character," wrote the *Albion*, "and a dignified repose, rendered majestic at times by his imposing figure, gives a tone to his performance wholly unlike the unrepressed energy and overwhelming physical power that formerly were the prominent characteristics of his style."

He seems to have been aglow with magnanimity on this occasion. He told his audience, on another evening, that, while he desired above all things "to bring the American stage within the influence of a progressive movement, to call forth and encourage American dramatic letters", he did not wish in any way to suggest that he held any "ungenerous mo-

tives toward the really deserving of any other country." "I should blush to imitate that narrow, exclusive, prejudiced, and, I may add, anti-American feeling which prescribes geographical limits to the growth of genius and talent." He rose to heights of bombastic speciousness and appeared generous.

On October 10, 1846, an invitation was sent him to accept the tender of a banquet to celebrate his return, carrying the signatures of forty-four worthy citizens, like William Cullen Bryant, James Lawson, Cornelius Mathews, William F. Havemeyer, Parke Godwin, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Prosper M. Wetmore, James T. Brady, Moses Taylor, Evert Duyckinck, Theodore Sedgwick, Henry Wicoff, and Charles M. Leupp. Forrest accepted on October 12, 1846, naming Friday the sixteenth as the date. It was the same sort of testimonial that had speeded him on his way to Europe in July, 1834, with the same flowery toasts and the same stately compliments. Bryant presided, and in his introduction of the guest of honor, he lauded the actor's art that vivifies and brings into moving reality what the dramatist has suggested; he praised Forrest's *Lear* and his *Othello*, which, in Bryant's opinion, transcended anything he had ever witnessed; he applauded Forrest's generosity toward his rivals — an empty sentiment, since it was devoid of truth; he referred indirectly to Forrest's difficulties abroad by complimenting him on his ability to "preserve the magnanimous silence of conscious greatness."

It was not to be long before Bryant was to with-

draw his friendship entirely from Forrest, when the actor's divorce suit was brought to trial. On the present occasion, however, Forrest was happy, not only in the praise bestowed on him, but in the opportunity to tell his friends something of his difficulties abroad.

You will pardon me, I am sure, if . . . I break that silence for a moment by referring to the opposition I encountered during my late reappearance upon the London stage. An eminent English writer, in the *North British Review*, makes these very just remarks: "Our countrymen in general have treated the Americans unkindly and unfairly, and have been too much disposed to exaggerate their faults and to depreciate their excellencies." . . . With regard to my own case, even before I had appeared, I was threatened with critical castigation, and some of the very journals which, upon my former appearance in London, applauded me to the echo, now assailed me with bitterest denunciations. Criticism was degraded from its high office,—degraded into mere cavilling, accompanied by very pertinent allusions to Pennsylvania bonds, repudiation, and democracy.

But, declared the actor, such injustice could not long stand; he was vindicated by sober judgment; the "hireling scribblers", the "theatrical cliques" gave way before unfeigned recognition of true merit. Abruptly he turned into the old channels of apostrophizing American dramatic letters, ringing the changes on his promises to encourage them. The American eagle could not refrain from crying, "Ha, ha", once more.

In connection with the cultivation and support of a National Drama, the friends of the stage will not be unmindful of the claims of our own deserving actors, among whom, I am proud to say, there are some may challenge successful comparison with any of the "stars" that twinkle on us from abroad, and, unlike most of those "stars", they shine with their own and not with a borrowed luster.

He pointed sincerely yet grandiloquently to Henry Placide, seated near.

Sweet harmony at this banquet, with discordant notes introduced by Forrest himself, who, even though honored by his own country, could not forget his personal wrongs. Had Leggett been alive, would he have advised more restraint in Forrest's burning sense of injustice? Over in London, Macready heard with disdain of this dinner.

On October 19, 1846, Forrest was playing in Philadelphia, and Durang draws attention to the national feeling which was rampantly in his favor, and which seemed to be evident wherever he traveled, giving his usual repertory. This was the period when Walt Whitman was pleading for the strengthening of our stage. "When," he asked, on September 4, 1846, "will American writers, even the best of them, learn to be true to the soul and thoughts God has given them? When will they pass the slough of the imitation of the conventionalities of other people?" In acting, he much preferred what he designated as the mental style of Macready "in his best days", to the usual way "which is boisterous,

stormy, physical, and repugnant to truth and taste.” When, on December 26, 1846, he wrote of Forrest as the *Gladiator*, which play “is as full of ‘Abolitionism’ as an egg is of meat . . . running o'er with sentiments of liberty”, he recognized in it expressions “calculated to make the hearts of the masses swell responsively to all those nobler, manlier aspirations in behalf of mortal freedom.” But Whitman was frank to confess that, even though hailed as a great exponent of classic style, Forrest’s manner was a dangerous one to follow.

All persons of thought will confess [he asserted] to no great fondness for acting which particularly seeks to “tickle the ears of the groundlings.” We allude to the loud-mouthed, ranting style — the tearing of everything to shivers — which is so much the ambition of some of our players — particularly the younger ones. . . . If they have to enact passion, they do so by all kinds of unnatural and violent jerks, swings, screwing of the nerves of the face, rolling of the eyes, and so on. To men of taste, all this is exceedingly ridiculous.

These faults were Forrest’s to a marked degree, though he possessed sufficient genius to add moments of the real exalted fervor, and was always vigorous in his treatment. In the years now to follow, he added no new rôle to his repertory, but, season in and season out, offered the same round of pieces.

Forrest swept the country through the accustomed circuit of the traveling star. The significant meaning of this was that, with his increasing dominance as America’s foremost tragedian, he was making the

most of his position to accumulate a fortune. He was astute, avaricious, unyieldingly businesslike in his negotiations. Cornelius Mathews records that, when he first met Mrs. Forrest, in her New York home on Twenty-first Street, she was virtually the actor's secretary and "kept a great ledger, chronicling every professional engagement of Mr. Forrest, — time, place, attendance, the writer, and reception of each piece, and the receipts of each house, regularly entered. This was constantly consulted as a guide to new engagements, and exhibited many interesting facts; among others, it seemed obvious that the bulk of Mr. Forrest's fortune had been derived from the original plays." This latter assertion adds force to the contention between the actor and his onetime friend, Doctor Bird. But, while Forrest, in waves of emotion, was prone to do the kindest acts, in order to aid those in distress, he would not yield an inch, either in financial demand or in personal aggressiveness, to save a friendship.

In the various contemporary reminiscences, we find Forrest constantly mentioned. He was the great Pyramid on the dramatic horizon. During the season of 1847-1848, he was in New Orleans, says Ludlow, playing thirty nights, averaging \$534, and he then went to Mobile for two weeks. His terms were one half the gross receipts. We note in detail why he did not go to the Smith-Ludlow Theatre in St. Louis. Old Sol gives the data. He wanted Forrest to fix a sum per night, which the actor refused to do, "saying that he never would act again

for a sum certain, but must have half the receipts wherever he played." Failing to reach an agreement for St. Louis, Forrest tried, with no success, to launch an opposition house there. This situation throws light on the following letter:

C. A. Logan to Sol Smith.

Cincinnati, April 16, 1848.

My dear Old Friend,—I have just received your friendly letter, and hasten to reply, although there is absolutely no news here, and scarce anything to write about. You, of course, ere this, must be aware that Forrest acted in Louisville, but you may *not* be aware that he received \$200 a night for so acting. A melancholy fact: \$200 for each night, and on some nights he *played* to a less sum; one night, at least, the *receipts* were but \$150, and he got \$200, leaving the manager to pay \$50 to the the star beyond the gross receipts, besides his own expenses! Blessed system! His whole engagement in Louisville was a failure, and he told me yesterday that the houses were a series of thunderbolts to him — his manner of expressing his astonishment at their thinness. He opened here last night to about \$700 — a far better house than any he had in Louisville, his benefit there being \$515. But he gets his \$200 a night here too, and asked me yesterday whether, if successful, there would be a chance of renewal. I suppose he would extend the length indefinitely on the same terms. . . .

Forrest is evidently angry with you for not offering him an engagement in St. Louis. He told me yesterday (but, remember, *this* must not be mentioned as coming from me) that he intended to *pay a visit* to St. Louis. I presume you understand the significance of his *paying a*

visit. Some years ago he said to me in Philadelphia, "Logan, I start tomorrow for Charleston." "The devil you do!" I replied; "you told me only yesterday the manager had refused your terms." "True, that 's the reason I'm going. When I'm *on the SPOT*, I think I can make him *change his mind!*" *and he did.* I believe you know I am one of your sincerest well-wishers, and, therefore, if I speak plainly, you will not misunderstand me. Your letter contains some justly indignant denunciations of the starring system. Ask yourself if you are not an active *particeps criminis* in it. . . .

This letter gives ample glimpse into the financial domination of the star in these days. If he was a drawing card of Forrest's magnitude, he could exert almost autocratic power. Logan pleaded with Smith to join with other managers in the West to refuse such terms and help break up the system. Forrest was playing under Bates in Louisville for \$200 a night. That sounded better to Sol than half the gross receipts. He wrote to Forrest, waiting long and patiently for an answer. When it came, dated Detroit, July 31, 1848, it was an imperious refusal of Sol's offer: "I regret I can not appear in St. Louis under your management; no amount of money could induce me to do so." Thus terminated the friendship of some twenty-six years — and we glimpse the methods of Big Business wielded by the Giant of Big Acting.

Here begins the prelude to tragedy. Macready returned to America in September, 1848. He was as sensitive as Forrest, and where, in the past, he had

maintained a judicious silence, he now unwisely began to talk, probably goaded to it by press insinuations and by the open signs of opposition wherever he went. He fired his first shot, in a curtain speech, on October 4, 1848. Some one in the gallery had hissed him. "Some journals in New York asserted that I am *superannuated*, and am incapable of presenting the impersonation of Shakespearean character," he said. "Ladies and gentlemen, I appeal to your judgment." Not content with this protest, he further, on October 25, 1848, alluded to the matter in stronger and still more unwise terms. "It cannot be disproved," he said to his audience, "however the failure of the plan may be quoted in denial of its existence, that a project was on foot to excite on this, my farewell visit to the American stage, a hostile feeling against me with the American public." He was flying in the face of a gale which he himself was partly exciting, and bringing upon himself further criticism, which led him to thoughts of legal action. The Boston *Mail*, on October 30, 1848, in his eyes was the miscreant, and the article carried such scare lines as :

MORE ABOUT MACREADY — HIS ABUSE OF  
FORREST IN EUROPE — ENDEAVORS TO  
PUT HIM DOWN IN PARIS, LONDON,  
AND EDINBURGH — HIS INTRIGUE  
WITH BULWER TO PREVENT  
FORREST PLAYING IN BUL-  
WER'S PIECES — HIS  
ABUSE OF AMERI-  
CANS.

The newspaper writer reviewed, with overemphasis, the whole tragi-comedy of Forrest's last trip abroad, laying squarely upon Macready's shoulders the latter's intention to persecute the American visitor. Such men as Macready and Anderson, so the writer claimed, came to America because, virtually, they were failures in their own country. Such printed declarations, overheated and based on misstatements, wounded Macready's vanity. It was this account which drove the English actor to legal council, Messrs. Reed and Meredith, of Philadelphia, undertaking to conduct a suit against the Boston journal. The cumulative interest in the quarrel became more absorbing as each week passed, and both Forrest and Macready, traveling on circuit, fanned public interest, not only by their close following of each other in professional engagements, but by their indiscriminate speeches and cards and pamphlets, which were widely circulated.

On November 20, 1848, at the Arch Street Theatre, there was an evident move to drive Macready from the stage, and, before the curtain, he delivered himself of the following sentiments. I quote from Rees :

He had understood, at New York and Boston, that he was to be met by an organized opposition, but he had abiding confidence in the justice of the American people. [Here the noise and confusion completely drowned his voice, and three cheers were attempted for Forrest, and three hearty ones were given for Macready.] He resumed by saying, "It was the custom in his country never

to condemn a man unheard." [Cheers and calls, a voice crying out, "Did you allow Forrest to be heard in England?"] He said, "I never entertained hostile feelings towards any actor in this country, and have never evinced a feeling of opposition to him." The actor alluded to had done that towards him, what he was sure no English actor would do — he had openly hissed him. [Great noise and confusion, hisses and hurrahs.] Up to the time of this act he had never entertained towards that actor a feeling of unkindness, nor had he ever shown any since. [Collision in boxes and great uproar throughout the house.] He said that he fully appreciated the character and feelings of the audience, and, as to his engagement, if it was their will, he was willing to give it up at once ["No, no," cheers and hisses]; but that he should retain in his memory the liveliest recollection of the warm and generous sentiments of regard shown him, and should speak of the American people, whom he had known and studied for the past twenty years, with the same kind feelings that he ever had done.<sup>1</sup>

Up to this time Forrest, contrary to his usual temper, had maintained an ominous silence, but, in the *Pennsylvanian* for November 22, 1848, he sought to answer the Macready challenge with a "Card."

Mr. Macready, in his speech, last night, to the audience assembled at the Arch Street Theatre, made allusions, I understand, to "an American actor" who had the temerity, on one occasion, "openly to hiss him." This is true, and, by the way, the only truth which I have been enabled to gather from the whole scope of his address. But why

<sup>1</sup> See direct statement in Macready's "Replies from England,"



*Photo by Aimé Dupont. Albert Davis Collection*

**WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY**

*"You will stand out hereafter as the last great actor of the English stage. It must be so; and I rejoice that associated with that position will be so much of private worth and general culture as we admire in you."*

— CHARLES SUMNER TO MACREADY, December 10, 1850.



say "an American actor"? Why not openly charge me with the act? for I did it, and publicly avowed it in the *Times* newspaper of London, and at the same time asserted my right to do so.

On the occasion alluded to, Mr. Macready introduced a fancy dance into his performance of *Hamlet*, which I designated as a *pas de mouchoir*, and which I hissed, for I thought it a desecration of the scene, and the audience thought so too, for, in a few nights afterwards, when Mr. Macready repeated the part of *Hamlet* with the same tomfoolery, the intelligent audience of Edinburgh greeted it with a universal hiss.

Mr. Macready is stated to have said last night, that up to the time of this act on my part, he had "never entertained towards me a feeling of unkindness." I unhesitatingly pronounce this to be a wilful and unblushing falsehood. I most solemnly aver and do believe that Mr. Macready, instigated by his narrow, envious mind, and his selfish fears, did *secretly* — not *openly* — suborn several writers for the English press to write me down. Among them was one Forster, a "toady" of the *eminent tragedian* — one who is ever ready to do his dirty work; and this Forster, at the bidding of his patron, attacked me in print even before I appeared on the London boards, and continued his abuse of me at every opportunity afterwards.

I assert also, and solemnly believe that Mr. Macready connived when his friends went to the theatre in London to hiss me, and did hiss me with the purpose of driving me from the stage — and all this happened many months before the affair at Edinburgh, to which Mr. Macready refers, and in relation to which he jesuitically remarks that "until that act he never entertained towards me a feeling

of unkindness." Pah! Mr. Macready has no feeling of kindness for any actor who is likely, by his talent, to stand in his way. His whole course as manager and actor proves this — there is nothing in him but self — self — self — and his own countrymen, the English actors, know this well. Mr. Macready has a very lively imagination, and often draws upon it for his facts. He said in a speech at New York, that there, also, there was an "organized opposition" to him, which is likewise false. There was no opposition manifested towards him there — for I was in the city at the time, and was careful to watch every movement with regard to such a matter. Many of my friends called upon me when Mr. Macready was announced to perform, and proposed to drive him from the stage for his conduct towards me in London. My advice was, do nothing — let the superannuated driveller alone — to oppose him would be but to make him of some importance. My friends agreed with me [that] it was, at least, the most dignified course to pursue, and it was immediately adopted. With regard to an "organized opposition to him" in Boston, this is, I believe, equally false; but perhaps in charity to the poor old man, I should impute these "chimeras dire" rather to the disturbed state of his guilty conscience, than to any desire upon his part wilfully to misrepresent.

Edwin Forrest.

Philadelphia, Nov. 21st, 1848.

On the same day, from the Jones Hotel, in New York, Macready issued a manifesto in reply, begging the public to reserve judgment upon all questions in dispute until there is reached "the decision of a legal tribunal, before which he will immediately take

measure" to bring the matter. Forrest's retort to this was a further airing of the complicity of Forster, Bulwer, and Macready to ruin his career. The dark clouds of legal action, which might have submerged Macready, were finally dispelled by Mr. William B. Reed, who advised no suit, since, first it might detain the English actor in America an unwarrantable length of time, and second, because the injury sustained by the printed calumny in the Boston paper was in its effect negligible. It would be unwise for a stranger to be enmeshed in local American courts. I cannot believe that Macready preserved the dignity claimed for him by such writers as Lawrence Barrett; nor can I believe that Forrest's ungentlemanly conduct was the chief cause for the incidentals leading to the Astor Place Riot. A fair weighing of the part Macready took in the London seasons of Forrest would show that, while he was consumed by jealousy, he did not actively engage against the American. Yet his very silence (which always broke bounds in his Diaries), and his excited watchfulness of both friends and press, showed to such devoted followers as Forster how much at heart the matter was to him. In America, Forrest's references to national hatreds, his florid anger, helped to create a partisan spirit in the public mind, which feeling, in the end, completely divorced itself from the leadership of Forrest and from the personal enmity of rival actors, and roused those political mischief-makers, always ready to capitalize on the slogan, "the honor and glory of our country."

Macready was playing at the Boston Athenæum when the Boston *Mail* took up the cudgels for Forrest. He might then have told them that his dear friend, Dickens, had refrained from coming to the ship to wish him God-speed on this last American visit, but had written from "Broadstairs", on September 1, 1848, that he feared his presence might still further anger the Americans, who were smarting under the impression that "Chuzzlewit" was an insult and an outrage. He besought Macready that "whatever you see or hear stated of me, whatever is addressed to you, or to anybody else in your presence, never contradict it, never take offence at it, never claim me for your friend or champion me in any way." He did not even wish Macready to send communications to him through the mail, and, as a postscript, added, "I wish to heaven I could undedicate 'Nickleby' until you come home again."

Though Macready railed at the Boston papers and others as ruffianly in tone, though he now regarded Forrest as an ignorant man, burning with envy at the success of another (might not the application be reversed to himself?), though he tried to be amused by the coarse humor about himself in the "penny paper" — otherwise the Boston *Mail*, — though he acted *Hamlet* with seeming indifference as to how the "idle" speech (Act. III, Sc. 2) would be taken, he was consumed with fears and jealousies and hatreds. On October 16 he exclaims, "I am for England — God!" Yet, all the while, he was finding pleasure in talk with Charles Sumner, on politics,

the Free Soil Movement, the elections ; he was being besought by George William Curtis and by Ticknor to disregard the Forrest “slanders” ; he was finding no satisfaction in his support at the theatre—brutes with no intelligence!—; he was disgruntled by an audience that sat unresponsive to him, when he suspected that they “would have cheered on a thick-headed, thick-legged *brute* like Mr. Forrest.”

It is a sad commentary that, at this juncture, there was no sane opposition to the currents of slander being circulated hither and thither. There were many evidences of the imminence of momentary outbreak. The matter ceased to be one of individual merit of the players ; it became a social schism which clearly brought the intelligentsia to the side of Macready, and the rabble to championing Forrest, who became their symbol of nationalism, their excuse for open riot. Macready lived in fear of things being thrown at him on the stage ; he divested himself of any excess money, for fear he might be assaulted on the streets and robbed ; he always wanted witnesses about him, since his mind had now become litigious. Many times he thought to terminate his engagement, and when, within a few hours of the actual riot, on Monday, May 7, 1849, he opened at the Astor Place Opera House with “Macbeth”, Forrest appearing the same evening at the Broadway Theatre in the same rôle, and was met with open antagonism from people in the parquet, he reached the conclusion that it was time to end his engagement. Placards sprang to light, eggs were thrown,

a chair was uprooted and flung to the stage. For some time, Macready stood outwardly unmoved; then he gave orders to lower the curtain. The unruly had won a victory! It was then that Macready announced his intentions of cutting short his "farewell", of terminating his engagement under Niblo and Hackett, and sailing for home immediately. It was then that the *New York Herald*, for May 9, 1849, published the following open letter:

To W. C. Macready, Esq.,

Dear Sir:— The undersigned, having heard that the outrage at the Astor Place Opera House, on Monday Evening, is likely to have the effect of preventing you from continuing your performances, and from concluding your intended farewell engagement on the American Stage, take this public method of requesting you to reconsider your decision, and of assuring you that the good sense and respect for order, prevailing in this community, will sustain you on the subsequent nights of your performances.

Ambrose L. Jordan  
 Edward Sandford  
 Willis Hall  
 James Foster, Jr.  
 Duncan C. Pell  
 Ogden Hoffmann  
 Howard Henderson  
 Samuel B. Ruggles  
 James Collis  
 Edward S. Gold  
 William Kent  
 John W. Francis  
 Wessell S. Smith

Washington Irving  
 Francis B. Cutting  
 Joseph L. White  
 Matthew Morgan  
 David C. Colden  
 Ogden P. Edwards  
 John R. Bartlett  
 Richard Grant White  
 Evert A. Duyckinck  
 J. Prescott Hall  
 Robt. J. Dillon  
 Ralph Lockwood  
 Wm. C. Barrett

## THE DEADLY LUXURY OF HISSING

W. M. Prichard	David Graham
Benj. D. Silliman	Edward Curtis
David Austen	James Brooks
M. M. Noah	J. S. DeKay
F. R. Tillou	Jacob Little
Henry J. Raymond	H. W. Field
Pierre M. Irving	Charles A. Davis
Denning Duer	Herman Melville
Moses H. Grinnell	George Bruce
Simeon Draper	Cornelius Mathews
Henry A. Stone	

Such a public assurance of good will toward the visitor did not have the desired effect of stemming the angry tide of feeling; nor were the men who lent their signatures far-sighted enough to see that the matter had grown into a class war from which serious results might arise.

If, in the reminiscences of his boyhood, Henry James did not see fit to mention Forrest, even as a curiosity in his New York theatregoing, the silence he maintained was but another indication of the snobbish feeling that existed against the American actor. We have, however, in James' review of the *Diaries* (1875), a criticism by implication which is enlightening, and is expressive of a decided partisan spirit in favor of the English visitor. James wrote:

Compared with most members of the theatrical profession, he [Macready] was an accomplished scholar; he was zealous, conscientious, rigidly dutiful, decorous, conservative in his personal tastes and habits. He was never popular, we believe, with the members of his own profession,

who thought him arrogant and unsociable, and for whom he fixed the standard, in every way, uncomfortably high. It was perhaps an irritating sense of all this that prompted an anonymous ruffian, while Mr. Macready was acting at Cincinnati, in 1849, to protest by hurling upon the stage, from the gallery, the half of the raw carcass of a sheep; and it was certainly the same instinctive hostility of barbarism to culture that led Edwin Forrest to denounce his rival in a vulgar letter to the London *Times* as a "superannuated driveller", and to suffer his followers to organize the disgraceful scenes of the Astor Place Riot.

Those who begged Macready to complete his engagement were equally as sure that the whole rising tide of feeling was due to the "instinctive hostility of barbarism to culture."

There had been many stage riots in theatre history which involved the theatrical rights of the pittites, such as the not far distant O. P. Riots of Kemble's day. There had been disturbances, such as those which manifested themselves in the cases of Anderson and Kean in America. Even Forrest had been in the centre of a disturbance when, at the Bowery Theatre, on July 9, 1833, he had played *Metamora* for the benefit of the stage manager, George P. Farren. The latter had, according to the words of Philip Hone (Diary, July 10), "made himself obnoxious by some ill-natured reflections upon the country." Before the performance, the mob besieged the doors of the theatre, broke them open, captured the house, hissed, pelted manager Hamblin, who had held aloft an American flag. But Hamblin

was not American born, and only “American Forrest” could make them heed the news that Farren had left the theatre!

But it was beyond the “American Forrest” to save the situation now. In fact, he was too poisoned mentally to be able to want to save it, though credit must be given him that by no overt act on his part was the quarrel hastened to its climax. He had, it is true, according to the New York *Herald* of May 10, 1849, received from the “Chevalier” Henry Wikoff, as early as February 9, 1849, a letter which ran as follows:

To Edwin Forrest, Esq.

Dear Sir:—In reply to your inquiries, I beg to state that, during the winter of 1836-37, whilst you were performing at Drury Lane theatre, in London, I had frequently the pleasure of meeting, at his own house, and elsewhere, Mr. Albany Fontblanque, the accomplished editor and proprietor of the *Examiner* newspaper, as well as various members of his family. Knowing my intimacy with you, both he and they were often in the habit of explaining and apologizing for the coarse abuse, the bitter invectives and spiteful scurrility against your acting and person, that weekly appeared under the theatrical head of the *Examiner*. From frequent conversation with these parties, I gathered the following facts: that the theatrical department of said journal had been confided to the exclusive direction of a person by the name of Forster, who had in the main acquitted himself, previously, with ability, discretion and taste; but that, on your appearance at Drury Lane, his course and temper had completely changed, and that, instead of treating your performances

with the impartiality which had always before characterized the *Examiner*, he had, to their sincere regret, abandoned himself to a wholesale system of unsparing detraction and undeserved censure, exceeding the utmost limits of dramatic criticism. Both Mr. Fontblanque and his family testified, over and over again, their undivided approval of your acting, which they evinced by their almost constant presence at the theatre during the whole period of your performances.

In seeking a solution of this strange contradiction between the opinions and the taste of the distinguished editor of the *Examiner* and one of his *employées*, whom he found it inconvenient to displace, I discovered that the said Forster was on terms of the closest intimacy with Mr. Macready, the English actor. From this I was allowed to infer two things: First, That it was to win the favor of his friend and patron, Mr. Macready, that Forster did his best not only to write down his American rival, but to stir up such opposition as would militate against his (your) success in England. Secondly, That it was any time in the power of Macready, by a look or word, to arrest the foul stream of unmanly abuse that was weekly poured out upon you; for, though it was not stated that Mr. Macready would not commit himself, by issuing instructions in so many words, to his friends, to assail you, yet it is clear to me, from all that was said, as it will be to anyone, from the circumstances cited, that, if it had pleased Mr. Macready to relieve you from the pertinacious and brutal attacks of the most servile of his friends, it was entirely within the scope of his known influence to do so. I merely desire to add, that I do not take it upon myself to repeat the words of Mr. Fontblanque and his family at this distant time; but the impressions left

on my mind by repeated conversations with them on the subject, are still fresh and indelible, and, for the authenticity of which, as related, I pledge my word and honor.

Very truly yours,

Henry Wikoff.

This letter was made public by Forrest, and was indication that he was using the same methods of gathering proofs to substantiate his position that Macready was. The latter went more systematically about it. He published certain papers gathered by him as refutation to the various charges brought against him. The pamphlet bore the title, "Replies from England to Certain Statements Circulated in this Country respecting Mr. Macready", and the foreword was dated May 8, 1849. After printing the Boston *Mail* article and the two public "cards" issued by himself and Forrest, the various letters followed. Fontblanque unequivocally denied that Macready, in any way, had influenced the *Examiner*, save to beg Forster to temper his pen in writing of Forrest. John Mitchell, who, as lessee of the St. James' Theatre in London, had taken the English company to Paris, repudiated any idea that it was through Macready that Forrest was kept from acting before the French public. Bulwer-Lytton, under date of November 26, 1848, declared emphatically that Macready had not influenced him in his attitude toward Forrest's desire to use two of his plays. So the documents went: affidavits from the High Sheriff of Edinburgh, from the manager of the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, and others. Macready

desired that such evidences of his lack of culpability should be in the hands of the public. The New York *Herald* reproduced the pamphlet on May 10, 1849, but the unwisdom of spreading such missives was discovered — too late unfortunately — and though the pamphlet was withdrawn from circulation, the mischief was done.

There seems to have been wanton denseness in the handling of the increasingly sensitive situation. At the moment of crisis, when warnings were being sent to city officials, when managers Hackett and Niblo were being asked — after the demonstration of Monday evening — to close their theatre until tension had eased, there was no decisive voice raised in warning. Trouble-makers were at work, and among them was neither Forrest nor Macready. These two men may have had their petty jealousies, but they were not trying to capitalize politically on the state of public sensitiveness. Others were, however.

We must look to the allies of Tammany Hall for the real impetus leading to the Astor Place Riot. They were the directors of the rabble, as surely as Marat was in the French Revolution, and in their hands class hatred was stirred to threatening heights. Unfortunate as the incident was, the state of choler in New York City was such, during this hectic week of May, 1849, that nothing but musketry and evidences of rigid military control could have kept the mob within bounds.

Thursday, May 10, was the date set for Macready's reappearance as *Macbeth*. Forrest, in the mean-

time, was fulfilling his engagement at the Broadway Theatre. Adherents of both players were definitely separated. Let us follow the sequence of events as detailed in the *Herald*. It should be recalled that the Astor Place Opera House was situated midway between Broadway and the Bowery, one side on Eighth Street, the other on Astor Place. The Broadway side was protected by buildings, but there was an open space looking toward the Bowery. New York had just installed a new mayor, C. S. Woodhull, and a Common Council, the Whigs in control of the latter.

In its issue of May 9, the *Herald* traced the origins of the Macready-Forrest quarrel; it disputed the charge that the Macready disturbances were instigated by Forrest, who had financed the disturbers. In an editorial, it is shown that Boz, "the talented little Cockney", whined to Forster and his friends over American ways and manners, whipping them into a "red-hot" temper against everything American. It was not Macready, claims the *Herald*, that started the trouble, but Boz, with his book of lies! To this beginning was added the astounding lies of "Chevalier" Wikoff, who tried to ingratiate himself into the magic "Boz" circle and sneakingly tried to poison the mind of Forrest. The *Herald* pleaded for cessation of trouble. "Boz on one side and the New York 'b'hoys', on the other, have 'said their say!'" Let the Macready engagement continue. The old scores are closed!

The *Herald* did not act on its own advice. The next day it reproduced the Macready pamphlet,—

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the very day of the night of the riot. Meanwhile significant things were transpiring, in view of the evening's performance. This fact was revealed in the subsequent examination of the parties involved. Placards sprang up in vacant places, reading thus:

WORKINGMEN,  
SHALL  
AMERICANS OR ENGLISH RULE  
*In this city?*

The Crew of the *British Steamer* have threatened all Americans who shall dare to express their opinion this night, at the *English Aristocratic Opera House!*!

We advocate no violence, but a free expression of opinion to all public men!

WORKINGMEN! FREEMEN!  
STAND BY YOUR  
LAWFUL RIGHTS.

AMERICAN COMMITTEE.

Macready might be willing to withstand such opposition, but the opposers were determined — so this would show — to deal, whether true or not, with more inflammable reasons for opposition than mere theatricals. The feeling for order and propriety preached by the *Herald* in its issue of May 10 was far from being a fact. Indeed, many ominous activities were transpiring. A certain man, named Captain Isaiah Rynders, had bought fifty tickets for Macready's "Macbeth", and he had planted these in the hands of his henchmen. This was a sufficient red streak in the immediate horizon to warrant precautions being taken, for Rynders was an expert agitator, with a "record." He was chief of the Empire Club, an auxiliary arm of the Tammany

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Wigwam, and his method of argument was usually with fists. He had been a New Orleans gambler, and had riotously broken up Whig political meetings and gatherings of the Abolitionists. His was the typical "gang spirit." In him, Mike Walsh, who had moved in previous years against the political aspirations of Forrest, found a willing ally.

How far these two men became the ringleaders was to be seen after the riot when, with lists of dead and wounded before them, they harangued the crowds in the Park and waved the flag of hatred and "civic duty." Instinctively the mob called for them, and the mob had been gathered by a summons to all "Citizens opposed to the destruction of Human Life." It was inflamed against the Mayor, the Recorder, the Sheriff, for their methods in quelling the rights of the people. These men should be indicted, shouted the crowd. To call out the militia was an outrage against innocent people!

The real facts were that the Mayor, having been informed of the imminence of riot, had assembled his advisers and determined to call upon the police and special deputies for assistance, Niblo and Hackett desiring the performance to go on and claiming protection by the civil authorities. It was decided also to call out the military, probably the first time in the history of the city that such use was made of an armed force. A careful reading of the way in which this armed force was disposed of, for protection of property and life, would show that by every precautionary measure it was stationed to overawe

the mob spirit, and not to use force unless goaded to it. That the latter proved to be the case was afterwards shown by the testimony of many witnesses. Stones and brickbats were the weapons of the mob that jammed the streets about the Opera House; while inside the building the police made arrests under definite instructions. There was no time for the issuance of proclamations at that moment. In many ways the crowds were warned to disperse, volleys were fired above their heads to scare them away, and then, when nothing seemed able to bring realization to their infuriated minds — helped on to destruction by youthful rowdies who knew nothing of the issue but merely were joyful participants in a fight — then it was that a direct volley laid low the lives of those who stood near, whether culpable or not.

Why had the authorities waited till the crucial moment to bring the militia on the scene? Why had they not, at the very first, stationed them at vantage points to quell the mob? Why, in fact, had they not insisted on closing the Opera House? Instead, the ominous tread of soldiery, as they came upon the spot, only maddened the people to excess. Here were painted warriors who had not even shown their uniforms in the Mexican War, yelled the crowds. Showers of stone endangered the uniformed men, made the horses of the cavalry rear in madness.

Who fired the first shots? Colonel Duryea, of the Seventh Regiment, under orders, gave the command. He had attempted to charge with bayonets, but the

mob was too close for a successful rush, and it was wild — wild in the belief that all this military force was a mere show, and that the cartridges were blank. According to the evidence of General C. W. Sandford, major general of the military forces of the county, there were about two hundred and ten soldiers facing a mob estimated as anywhere from ten to twenty thousand.<sup>1</sup>

Inside the theatre the scene was of a different nature, though pandemonium reigned even there.

Macready had bravely, and contemptuously, met each condition as it arose. On Monday evening he had gone through the first act of the play in dumb show, calmly dodging the pennies, eggs, potatoes, lemons, pieces of wood, and asafoetida thrown at him. He had tried to quell such behavior with a look, but unavailingly. When the orchestra moved out of range of the missiles, then it was that Macready decided he had quite fulfilled his professional obligations. The performance was stopped. When, on the evening of the tenth, he went to the Opera House, he confesses he started gayly. Perhaps there was a quaver of uneasiness as he saw cars disgorging the police along the theatre streets, and still more when he made his entrance on the stage. In the face of fist shaking and savage calls, *Macbeth* went on with his lines, now and again pointing with his truncheon to the offenders, who were breaking the peace. His real courage in proceeding was covered by an insulting disdain of the crowd. Then the

<sup>1</sup> See Northall's account.

bombardment began outside. Panels of doors were cracked open, glass windows were smashed, and the air was filled with showers of glass. The galleries took courage, and the second act was drowned by the uproar. Actors with less spirit than either Macready or his plucky *Lady Macbeth* begged him to cut the scenes and make the play short. This he would not do. Pipes were broken, and water deluged Macready's dressing room.

So the play progressed, and Macready declares that, despite every cause given him to despair, "I flung my whole soul into every word (of the fifth act) I uttered, acting my very best and exciting the audience to sympathy, even with the glowing words of fiction, whilst these dreadful deeds of real crime and outrage were roaring at intervals in my ears, and rising to madness all round us." In his Diaries he would lead us to believe that the evening was his triumph. None the less, the mob was growing stronger, and the militia filled the streets. Then the ominous rattle of musketry was heard.

Lester Wallack, a young man of twenty-nine, who, during this same year, was to appear as *d'Artagnan* in two dramatizations by himself, and was to show his picturesque excellence in melodramatic characters, was one of the throng that witnessed the riot from the outside. He wrote, in his "Memories of Fifty Years":

I stood in front of the Astor Place Opera House on the night of the famous Macready-Forrest riot where the crowd was thick<sup>est</sup>, with my back to the railings of Mrs. Langdon's house, and when the military (the eighth

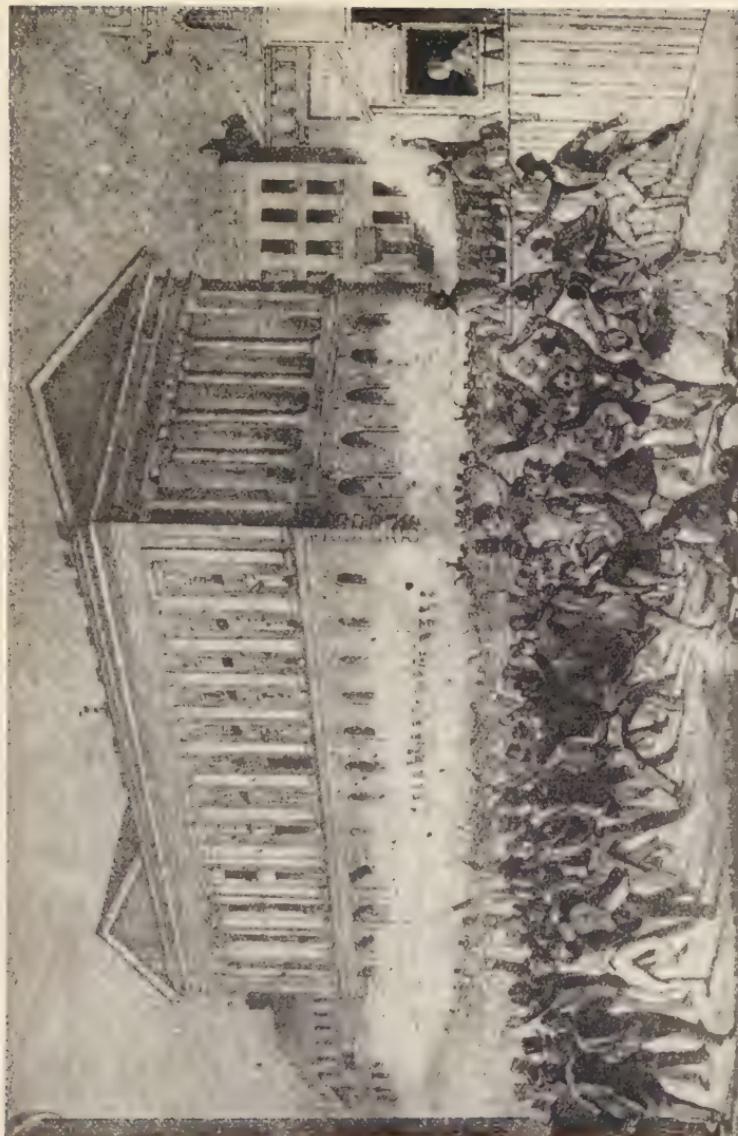
From the Albert Davis Collection

THE ASTOR PLACE RIOT, MAY 10, 1849

"Hark! what's that?" I asked. "The soldiers have fired."

"My God!" I exclaimed. "Another volley, and another."

WILLIAM MACREADY. In his Diary, May 10, 1849.





company of the Seventh Regiment) came up, there were, curious to say, a great many women in the crowd. After the second volley was fired, I heard a cry from behind me, and turned to see a man seated on the railings of Mrs. Langdon's house. He had been shot, and with a groan toppled over to the ground at my feet. I afterwards saw him lying dead at the hospital. After the firing I left the porch of the Union Club, then in Broadway, where I had taken refuge, with a "man about town", well known as "Dandy Marks." We stopped at a restaurant on Broadway, and found there a crowd made up of all sorts of people, discussing this riot. The town was in a fearful condition, and for several days after was like a city in a state of siege. Some were saying it was a rascally thing that the people should be shot down and murdered in the streets, and others were arguing that the military had only done their duty. Marks naturally was all on the side of the military, because he commanded a troop of horse which dressed after the English 10th Hussars, and was composed of young men of the best families in the city. One debater got so extremely excited discussing the riot that the tears ran down his face, and at length, in a sort of frenzy, he took off his coat and began "letting out" at everybody around him, no matter whether his victims were on his side of the question or not. He hit here, and there, and cracked right, left, and center, clearing the whole place in a very few moments. When the thing was over, Marks was not to be found; and I had retired early myself!

We note Wallack adding,

"Forrest, in the engagement during which the riots occurred, played *Macbeth*, and when the lines came,

‘What rhubarb, senna or what purgative drug will scour these English hence?’ the whole house rose and cheered for many minutes.”

Being himself fundamentally an Englishman, Wallack was clearly in sympathy with Macready, regarding him as an actor far superior to Forrest, oftentimes approaching perfection in such a part as *Virginius*.

The friends of Macready advised him to make his escape from the rioters in disguise. This he did and went to the house of Robert Emmett, whence, in a carriage, he was quickly taken to New Rochelle to await the Boston train. The Diaries show a hiatus from May 15 to London, June 9. A fleeing English actor, numberless dead upon the streets of New York, a disquieted populace, proclamations now warning the citizens to stay away and desist from lingering in crowds on street corners, coroner and jury attempting to place the blame, soldiery for many a day parading back and forth, with artillery pieces trundling along the streets — all the price of a hiss in Edinburgh!

Macready proceeded to Boston, and from there he sailed for home. Dickens, on reading of the riot, sent a note from Devonshire Terrace to Mrs. Macready, deplored the “hostility of the business”, and rejoicing that his friend would come back to them “out of that damnable jumble . . . of false pretensions and humbugs.”

But the mob that night were in no mood to think Macready had escaped. They would have torn down the theatre, they would have wrecked the New

York hotel where he was staying, they would have overturned the omnibuses along Broadway in their wild search for him, had not the militia first given them an outlet for their anger and derision, and then overawed them with a charge of cold steel. Despite the cry of Rynders that it was murder, despite the popular plea that the National Guards were called to support the white-kid-gloved aristocrats against warm-hearted, simple Americans, it was really a test of law and order against rowdyism that night of May 10. Mike Walsh shrieked against the nabobs of the Fifteenth Ward as enemies of the people. He declared himself ready to shoulder a musket in defense of the people, if ever again the militia were called out to shoot down the innocent citizenry. Yet, on the Sunday following the riot, ministers from the pulpits of the city declared that Macready should have been made to remain in New York, protected, if need be, by ten thousand soldiers. Did they, however, stop to think what might have been the outcome, without the small force which bore the brunt of the outburst? Did they realize fully what it was all about? The very morning after, in the calm glare of stark death before them, mob leaders were posting placards, such as the one on the following page.

The Union Rifles, the Washington Guards, the City Guards, the Montgomery Guards (such were the pre-Civil War names for the armed forces in New York), hussars and dragoons and pieces of artillery, were left in possession of the scene of

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carnage, while a jury sat to determine the blame for the affair. In the *Herald* issue of May 13, 1849, I note a theatrical criticism of Forrest's *Metamora* on the twelfth, when he elicited prolonged applause, and when the bare whisper of Macready's name called forth a loud whistle. The city seems to have settled down quietly, despite the further precautionary measures to safeguard from any reaction.

AMERICANS!  
AROUSE! THE GREAT CRISIS  
HAS COME! !  
Decide now whether English  
ARISTOCRATS! ! !  
AND  
FOREIGN RULE!  
shall triumph in this,  
AMERICA'S METROPOLIS,  
or whether her own  
SONS,  
whose fathers once compelled the base-born miscreants to succumb, shall  
meanly lick the hand that strikes, and allow themselves to be deprived of  
the liberty of opinion — so dear to every true American heart.  
AMERICANS! !  
Come out! and dare to own yourselves sons of the iron hearts of '76! !  
AMERICA.

### A TYPICAL ASTOR PLACE RIOT PLACARD

At the Bowery Theatre, manager Hamblin was giving "The Stranger", "Othello", "Hamlet", "The Merchant of Venice." While "Rome burned", he was deep in rehearsals of "King John." Burton, at his own theatre, was playing *Captain Cuttle* in "Dombey and Son", while lighter forms of amusement were represented by Christy's Minstrels and the New Orleans Serenaders.

To the very last, Macready tried to vindicate

## THE DEADLY LUXURY OF HISSING

himself, on the testimony of such friends as George William Curtis and William H. Prescott. A group issued a statement from Boston, showing how innocent he was of complicity. But the evil was done, and no matter what the sense of the insensate crowd might be, mobocracy had received a startling answer from law and order.

It was Judge Daly who charged the Grand Jury in connection with the Astor Place Riot. (See *Western Law Journal*, 7: 680.) His was a significant pronouncement of the necessity for quelling mob law. "If there is a government, gentlemen, upon earth," he declared, "in which an unauthorized resort to violence is entirely without excuse, it is that under which we live." The tenor of his argument was to justify the calling out of armed forces and to divest the minds of the jurors of any prejudice which might blind them to the legal rightness of such action under undue stress of circumstances. This excerpt is of especial significance, since Forrest had claimed, in Edinburgh, that he had not only justification, but right, to show his displeasure in an audible way. The Judge designated that:

Whatever opinion may be entertained of the propriety of dramatic and theatrical representations, it is lawful to represent, and lawful to witness them. One of the consequences resulting from this species of amusement is, the right of the audience to give spontaneous expression to the feelings of approbation or disapprobation which the representation inspires. This is nothing more than the right which anyone has to criticise a book, or any work of

art, presented for his entertainment or profit. In the theatre, this has been a right of immemorial usage; but it does not rest on that alone, for it has received the solemn sanction of a Court of Justice. [The Judge then read a decision of Sir James Mansfield, in a case arising out of the O. P. Riots of London.]

But this right has its modifications, explained the Court:

It does not imply a right to create a tumult in the theatre, to throw missiles at the actors, or to destroy property. Nor does it imply the right of a few to give or continue the expression of their disapprobation in such a manner as to prevent the majority present from witnessing the performance, if they desire to do so. Least of all does it imply a right to combine, and go to the theatre, to prevent a particular performance, or to hiss an actor from the stage.

Forrest, if he heard or read any of this charge, must have felt satisfaction that he had not transgressed the law in Edinburgh, however lacking he might have been otherwise.

The *Home Journal* for May 12, 1849, assumed the proper slant toward the riot. It remarked, editorially, that "The 'Bianchi and Neri' of Florence, and the 'White and Red Roses' of York and Lancaster, were never more distinctly divided into antagonistic parties, than the 'B'hoys' of New York and the 'Upper Ten.'" Which makes us wonder if there would have been the disturbance at all, had Macready appeared in any other theatre than the Astor Place Opera House. To accentuate the social

difference, the *Journal* declared that "The white handkerchiefs that waved all over the boxes and parterre diffused an atmosphere that made the house fragrant as a perfumer's shop; while the rotten eggs, potatoes, pennies and coarse placards equally betrayed the domestic habits of the opposition." The writer of the *Journal's* editorial (was it N. P. Willis?) avows his opinion that "Mr. Macready's *real* offence in the eyes of those who drove him from the stage, is in being rather rancidly superfine in his personal manners, and in being dined out continually by the up-towners."

Forrest could not have organized the cabal against Macready. The *Journal* becomes incisive in its character portrayal of the American tragedian:

He is capable of no such thing. A stronger instance of a man who is his own worst enemy, we never saw; but he thinks quite too well of himself to condescend to employ others in his hostilities. No better evidence of this could be given than his disdaining to employ counsel or secretary for his correspondence on this very subject — utterly paralyzing the rights of his cause, and the public sympathy in it, by the lame logic and undignified violence with which he expressed himself. If, instead of a self-will which amounts to a disease, and a defiance of social and intellectual laws which results from a fierce resentment at any possible inferiorities in his own station or education — if, instead of these two cankers in the side of Forrest, he had a grain of humility and an ounce of policy, he could have staggered Mr. Macready's success much more effectively than it has been done, for him, by the b'hoys of the Bowery.

Since the basis of the useless quarrel was social, then it would be necessary, in the future, so this *Journal* argued, for the wealth of the Republic to "be mindful where its luxuries offend." Did we not object, queried the writer, when the Opera House and the Broadway Theatre were opened, to the "aristocratizing of the Pit"? By such a demarcation, a *dangerous consciousness* of class was created. At the basis of this recent riot, the *Journal* declared, in its issue of May 26, there was "a protest of the middle class at *the degree too much* of ostentation by the wealthier." In years gone by, Jackson had fought an aristocracy of banking. The common people wanted no special privileges for any one or in any way.

It was a useless riot, not deep-founded on any issues, removed from the petty concerns of the two actors, and manipulated by the typical mob spirit. But its outbreak, and its summary culmination in tragedy, put a final end to the Forrest-Macready discussion. The English actor went home and prepared for his retirement; the American actor was soon to be enmeshed in his own woeful domestic problems. He had been silent during the theatrical turmoil, but for twelve years he had been unhealthily stirred by suspicion and jealousy. He was now entering upon another fifteen years of tortuous agony over imagined wrongs, which belittled him as a man and sapped his strength as an artist.

## CHAPTER XII

### A TRIAL BY JURY: "O CURSE OF MARRIAGE"

It was while Forrest was involved in the Macready quarrel that his suspicions were aroused as to the relations existing between an actor in his company and his wife. A foolish tempest in his mind set in motion a series of incidents which led to separation, to divorce, to constant appeals to higher courts from the decision of a jury, which, after listening to a curious conglomeration of distorted and false evidence in a trial which lasted from December 18, 1851, to January 24, 1852, awarded Mrs. Forrest three thousand dollars a year alimony, and completely vindicated her from charges brought against her by her husband. Any fair weighing of the evidence will show that there was almost a diabolical purpose in the whole proceeding, where Forrest stooped to any means to prove his innocence to the public. Even a jury decision would not serve to satisfy him; he possessed a full measure of un wisdom. He kept the fight up from year to year; he railed against the bitter injustice of the law; he persisted in all channels possible to law to dispute its course until, when finally he was ordered to pay back alimony, Catherine Sinclair's legal bills all but swamped the sum due her.

The stage set was such as Mrs. Anna Cora Mowatt would have delighted in. The divorce proceedings were vulgar, full of backstairs testimony — such evidence as springs up where clever instruction and bribery overawe ignorance, where threats cow the inferior character into obedience to desire. Forrest stooped about as low as he could, while Catherine Sinclair maintained an attitude that gained her the respect of the curious, gaping crowds flocking daily to the courtrooms. The entire upheaval was typical of the forties; the morals were of the ragged sort which went with the formal respectability of the upholstered and crystal-lighted rooms of that era. The tinge of sedate literary life was mixed with the glitter of the mimic world. The Forrests had mingled with the Parke Godwin, Bryant, Willis set, and these names were cited in the testimony, while in person they were hailed to the witness stand. New York was agog with interest. The court proceedings were published in book form by the New York *Herald* and the *Police Gazette*. It was even believed that Forrest paid to have them printed. He doubtless thought that their wide circulation would gain him sympathy. Charges of infidelity on both sides were daily aired, while flimsy, stodgy descriptions of orgiastic evenings at the Forrest home filled columns of print. Forrest was to find satisfaction, in after years, in possessing the "Proceedings" in his library, specially bound, together with various tracts on Woman Rights, Marriage, and Morals.

Forrest had many romantic dreams about the kind of life he should live with Catherine Sinclair. No one yearned more after domesticity than he, but on his own baronial terms. The dependent helpmate was his ideal, and his devotion was secure on that understanding. As long as a woman would accept such a contract, she was sure of his loyalty and devotion. As long as he could regulate her life, know fully her ways and manners, he was happy in her graces and her pleasures. But near the surface lurked the jealousies which fed on suspicions. All of his women kind paid him blind devotion; he could bestow anything out of his hoarded wealth for such fealty. But the unfortunate thing was that Catherine was not always with him. He himself was free to do as he had a mind; he might travel with his leading ladies, as he did, for example, with Josephine Clifton, whose name was brought into the trial, even though she had died in the meantime, and yet resent any challenge on the score of his own inconstancies. When he became, like *Othello*, consumed with his own supposed wrong, he turned upon the object of his affection and hounded her. Wounded vanity overrode him. It is clearly evident, however, at every step of the divorce proceedings, that Forrest loved the object of his hatred. His violent, bitter, stinging anger gave him unbridled scope to act the rôle of injured manhood. He passed from one absurdity to another.

There was only one important letter read into the testimony of the trial. It was not of the romantic

sort, such as was the model of the time; but very definitely took a modern attitude of self-independence. The letter was sent by Mrs. Forrest to James Lawson, who attempted later to occupy the difficult position of good friend to both sides, and who saw through the heat of conflict to the real condition of their affection. Alger claims that Forrest had given much thought to the subject of woman's rights, but Alger's own measurement of the duties of a wife — which undoubtedly met the approval of Forrest and was probably enriched by his own thoughts — was sentimentally ancient. To them both the supreme happiness that exists between man and woman —

is a pure, calm, holy, and impassioned love, joining them in one life, filling both soul and body with a peaceful and rapturous harmony, glorifying the scenery of nature by its reflections, making the current of daily experiences a stream of prophetic Bliss, revealing to them authentic glimpses of God in each other, and opening eternity to their faith with mystic suggestions of worlds by-gone and worlds to come, lives already led and forgotten and lives yet to be welcomed.

Such cherubic vacuity was scarcely the kind of life for a woman of Catherine Sinclair's nature — she who loved life. Forrest occupied much the position of the cat in the nursery rhyme, who, when away, might calculate for a certainty that the mice would play. There was much philandering in the forties. Why not, when propriety invited the *sub rosa* act? Such sweet-scented avowals of love as Forrest found

in his wife's drawer, written by the actor, George W. Jamieson — who had been fed up on a dose of George Sand's novel, "Consuelo" — coupled with the fact that Forrest had found the two together in Cincinnati — while on tour — in what he chose to consider a compromising situation, were the common farce situations of the age, and, if handled with wisdom, in this case, might have ended in a bit of righteous chiding and fatherly forgiveness. But the so-called "Consuelo" letter was brought into the lime-light, full of fatuous avowals, and not worth the paper space to reproduce. Jamieson was an actor of considerable merit; he had often crossed paths with Forrest on the theatre circuit, and was regarded by William Winter not only as an excellent player but as a much maligned being. The hysteria of the situation burst into immediate flame.

It was the year 1848, according to the little personal notes brought forward during the trial, that Mr. and Mrs. Forrest were in close correspondence about those small details Maeterlinck calls the "quotidian happenings of life", and signing themselves with most endearing epithets. "Your own Kate" was piling flattering unction to her "Dearest Edwin's" soul, by calling Macready "the old woman." She was making costumes for him, she was copying parts for him, she was sending dutiful messages of affection to his sisters, she was begging to be with him so she might help him pack his wardrobe. Toward his family, she was always cordial. When, in the summer of 1843, she went West with Forrest,

she wrote generously of her travels to Eleanora, showing due appreciation of the scene and making sincere inquiries as to the health of her mother-in-law. There was no want of attention on her part. No *Katherine* indeed could have been more docile before the lash of her *Petruchio*. In return, Forrest was sending to his wife detailed descriptions of the Macready controversy, showing by word and spirit how fundamentally he was shaken. "I am suffering from severe headaches," he writes her, "and these I could endure uncomplaining but for the horror of going before the public in an assumed character, in which, as in the case tonight, the blood will be sent to my brain with ten-fold force. This is the *pleasure* of acting! ! !"

As late as December 15, 1848, from Baltimore, in the proud consciousness that "Kate" approved his "Card" about Macready, he says: "This is a warm, bright, beautiful day, and I am sitting at an open window, in the Eutaw House; and while I write, there is above me a clear, blue, cloudless sky — just such a day as I yearn to have with you at Fonthill; but that must not be — at least for some time." His thoughts always turned toward the home he was building — the tiger longing for domestic peace, which his own turbulence would not countenance.

Intimations of softer tastes were to be found in his letters. For instance :

You remember Mr. Wood, who made our Glastonbury chair in England; he is now here, and has some beautiful specimens of carving after the antique, which I have been

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very much pleased with ; he has also specimens of carving of the Louis Quatorze style, which is very elaborate and very beautiful. I have thought to get him to fit the drawing-room at Fonthill, instead of sending for the transpice leather which we spoke of.

Again :

I am sorry your letter and the catalogue did not reach me until this moment, as I should like to have some of the Shakespeariana ; it is now too late ; but if you could send some one for tomorrow's sale, to buy Lamb's Chaucer, 361, and the old quarto plays, 369, I would pay for the first \$15, and for the plays \$10.

Such opportunities to give instructions afforded Forrest satisfaction ; he revelled in "orders", he enjoyed seeing them obeyed. In much the same fashion he instructed his mother, whose spirit was kindly, but whose intellect was so limited that she had to be coached explicitly whenever a bill was to be paid or a draft on the Girard Bank to be honored.

Forrest always fashioned his actions after a distinct pattern ; he always went about his good deeds and his own personal benefits as though he were planning for posterity, and not for the gratification of the moment. Four children were born to this pair, but none of them lived beyond infancy, and yet there was a fortune accumulating, through the actor's astuteness, which would have to be disposed of after his immediate family had passed away. The Forrest name was destined for oblivion, save where it was connected with some institutional benefit. Thus was born the Forrest Home idea.

The estate purchased by him, overlooking the Hudson and immediately above Riverdale, and the forbidding-looking castle built thereon, of gray granite in a mixture of Norman and Gothic design, was to serve as a home for him and his wife — two love-birds in a buttressed fort, amidst a fair outlook of neighboring towns, each tower with a winding staircase, quite in accord with the *Lady of Shalott*. Picture galleries and banqueting halls seem to have comprised the vision of Mrs. Forrest, who helped arrange the plans.

Into the cornerstone of such a formidable dovecote, which was called “Fonthill Castle”, were placed a copy of Shakespeare, some American coins, and the following confession of intent. The structure belied the motives somewhat, belied the idea of simple comfort, but maintained the usual noble gesture of the benefactor. Forrest wrote:

In building this house, I am impelled by no vain desire to occupy a grand mansion for the gratification of self-love; but my object is to build a desirable, spacious and comfortable abode for myself and my wife, to serve us during our natural lives, and at our death to endow the building with a sufficient yearly income, so that a certain number of decayed or superannuated actors and actresses of American birth (*all foreigners to be strictly excluded*) may inhabit the mansion and enjoy the grounds thereunto belonging, so long as they live; and at the death of any one of the actors or actresses inhabiting the premises, his or her place to be supplied by another from the theatrical profession, who, from age or infirmity, may be

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found unable to obtain a livelihood upon the stage. The rules and regulations by which this institution is to be governed will, at some future day, be framed by

Edwin Forrest.

How easy it was for a flamboyant Jacksonian Democrat to deceive himself through lack of taste! The feudal idea was out of keeping with "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Forrest's dream for Fonthill mounted to great heights, but the place was destined neither for a home nor for an actor's retreat. In the midst of the excitement of watching the place take shape lurked the smoke of impending tragedy. In November, 1848, the actor staged a big celebration of "the roofing" of the house, when he entertained the workmen in royal fashion. Speeches were made in praise of their handiwork, but, what sounded sweeter to the ears of Forrest, in praise of his own industry. The nameless orator (nameless in the *Evening Post* account) apostrophized :

His industry and his wealth have employed you. His perseverance has raised this majestic monument, a monument that will stand as a beacon-light to the present and future generations; for so long as that noble river, the Hudson, shall lead its thousands and tens of thousands of human beings onward, so long the uplifted eye will look upon the rays of the rising or the setting sun that will linger on the summit of those towers, and the lesson which every person may learn will be, that as industry, perseverance, frugality, temperance and genius have raised stone upon stone, so there is hope for you all.

The age of chivalry was not yet over; the paternalistic condescension of the overlord was rampant. Forrest, the Democrat, felt the consuming glory of Power. He rose to the occasion. When the time came for him to face the "numerous operatives" who had worked on Fonthill with such harmony, he was benign to his audience and blessed them all. No one was more conscious than he that he was a deserving pillar of society. The Fonthill walls and rafters rang with genial toasts and songs, and the national anthem ended the exercises. Then the workmen were given a half-holiday. All of this smacked of the manorial system. The event was only to be equalled by the Fourth of July celebration there, with the inevitable reading of the Declaration of Independence, the delivery of an oration, singing, and the booming of cannon. The American Eagle soon found a resting place in the castle of this native-born genius. In all of these happenings there was no show of humor. Forrest was profoundly dramatizing his own greatness.

He was past master in the Samuel Smiles self-help attitude. On one occasion, in New York, the Forrest Life Guards, clad in full regalia, occupied front row seats to witness his *Coriolanus*. He could not resist lecturing them on perseverance, as illustrated by his own career. It was getting to be an obsession with him — the monotony of such curtain speeches. *Polonius* could not be more wearisome in his notions about inspiring the young. "To catch the living lineaments of passion," he said, "I mixed with the

prince and with the potentate, with the peasant and with the proletary, with the serf and with the savage." He mounted high in his picture of industry, and chanted scorn at his enemies.

Some poor and friendless boy [he continued], perchance, imbued with genius, and with those refined sensibilities which are inseparably connected with genius, may be encouraged not to falter in his path for the paltry obstacles flung across it by envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Let him rather, with a vigorous heart, buckle on the armor of patient industry, with his own discretion for his tutor and then, with an unfaltering step, despising the malice of his foes, "climb the steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar!"

This was so appropriate for the uniformed group! But, *apropos* or not, the sentiments were greeted by a salvo of applause! There never was any lack of desire to applaud Forrest. He always carried the crowds with him. He could pull their heartstrings *terrifically*.

Then came the crash of all his dreams, — he who had longed to spend days at Fonthill with his wife; he who, always susceptible to the beauty of the natural scene, joyed in the views from his many turrets. Even when, in 1851, he moved to Philadelphia with his sisters, he turned again and again to this stone monument of broken hopes. Nothing that occurred to him but had its Byronic romanticism about it. There is record of a steamboat named the *Edwin Forrest* (there were race horses and club boats and steamers and locomotives and fire engines

and military companies and theatre organizations and play houses and hotels and sons of friends and admirers named after him) which, plying the Hudson, burst afame, immediately opposite Fonthill; and in the rescue of the passengers, Forrest swam back and forth, lending aid to the distressed. He also gave money to the widows of those who went down.

The last we hear of Fonthill was in 1856, when Forrest, who was being drained by the law courts, sold his dream to the Catholic Sisterhood of Mount St. Vincent for one hundred thousand dollars, making a noble gesture on the payment of the second installment by giving to the Mother Superior his personal check for five thousand dollars.

Forrest claimed that suspicion as regards the conduct of his wife was thrust upon him by her untoward behavior with Jamieson on May 31, 1848. It was almost a year afterwards, May 1, 1849, that he and Mrs. Forrest separated. They left their Twenty-second Street house together in comic fashion — the house, wherein, according to the untrustworthy evidence gathered by fair and foul means, there were pictured scenes of wild living, Mrs. Forrest maintaining late hours and easy manners with such of her friends as Captain Calcraft and Richard Willis, a brother of the writer and editor, N. P. Willis. The two — husband and wife — rode to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Parke Godwin, with whom Mrs. Forrest was to live for several ensuing weeks. In the vehicle with them were a copy of Shakespeare and a “manly” portrait of Forrest

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himself, the last gifts he made her. Imagine the two seated there in smoldering silence, the canvas against their knees—the last ride together! At the door of the Godwins they parted, Forrest to lose not only a wife but a group of friends as well. Voluntarily he agreed to pay her fifteen hundred dollars a year. The jury that gave its verdict on January 24, 1852, in favor of the plaintiff, allowed her three thousand a year. James Lawson announced the separation to John Sinclair in London:

New York, May 1, 1849.

John Sinclair, Esq., London:

Dear Sir,—This afternoon, Mrs. Forrest addressed me a note, requesting me to write to you by this steamer, from which I infer that you are unadvised of some unpleasant circumstances that have happened in Twenty-second street. It is an irksome task; but rather than any intimation should first reach you through the newspapers, and, in obedience to her wish, I write. In her note to me, Mrs. Forrest says:—“You are the only person, except myself, who could, with propriety, write to my father on the subject; a very few lines will suffice; I will write by next steamer.”

On Saturday last (28th April), Mr. Forrest took your daughter to the house of Mrs. Godwin (Mr. Bryant's daughter), and there left her, with the intention of a formal separation. The cause of this separation I do not know; and neither party may ever disclose. It is now about three months since the first intimation of a difference came to my knowledge, yet, with the exception of a week or two at most, during which I remarked an extravagance of feeling, nothing was apparent in the conduct of either

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to warrant these events; it seemed impossible; but it has happened. Those who constantly visited them could not perceive anything in the conduct of either to make such an event necessary, or even probable.

From the time this unhappy affair was concluded on between them, Mrs. Forrest has conducted herself, as she always does, with admirable discretion; not a murmur has escaped her lips. Mr. Forrest has always been kind and considerate, and nothing in his conduct gives warrant for angry feelings or unkind treatment. He thinks he has made a self-sacrifice for some high principle; what, I know not.

I am persuaded that both parties are still warmly attached to one another; he, judging by his looks, has suffered deeply, and has grown ten years older during the last few months; she is not less afflicted. These things all considered, make this separation appear a mystery, which I cannot fathom. Time may do much for both.

Of one thing, I can assure you, your daughter's honor is unsullied. No breath of suspicion can touch it, and all who know her will bear testimony in her favor. The mutual friends of both parties remain the friends of each, which I am sure is pleasing to Mr. Forrest and to her, as it must be gratifying to you to know. No effort shall be left untried to bring about a reconciliation; but I dare not hold out the hope of a successful issue.

Virginia is with Mr. Forrest. Margaret remains at her former lodgings; her baby is a fine child. All are well in health.

Mrs. Lawson joins me in kindest regards to Mrs. Sinclair. With best wishes for your health and happiness, and that you may hear these tidings with a firm nerve, is the present hope of, dear sir, yours very truly,

James Lawson.

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The counter-suit brought by Mrs. Forrest against her husband was the sensation of New York City for six weeks. It revealed, however unauthenticated the evidence, the austere manner of Forrest, who moved, a taciturn figure, through his house, seated most of the time in the library — his temple — before the door of which servants passed in awe, while Mrs. Forrest did the social graces. Champagne suppers of this period heightened the wild philandering.

The evidence will also declare the fact [asserted the defendant's counsel] that in Mr. Forrest's absence, his house was made a scene of wassail. It discloses the fact that a literary coterie, by the fiat of whom every man must fall, and at the head of which was Mr. N. P. Willis, were in the habit of visiting Mr. Forrest's house during his absence, and that by them his wife was taught to look down upon the simplicity of her husband's character.

N. P. Willis, writing in review of the Forrest Testimony, and attempting a defence of his brother (*Home Journal*, April 6, 1850), who, according to Forrest, was one of the causes of his wife's infidelity, asserted that Mrs. Forrest's friends

were of a different class from his [Forrest's] own. . . . She is a person of the highest intellectual culture, and her friends were authors, clergymen, professors and artists, before whom the class of stories could not be ventured upon, in the telling of which constitutes, as we understand, Mr. Forrest's conversational powers. But, though he seldom appeared in the drawing-room and was uncomfortably dumb when any of this class of visitors were present, it was understood that it was his peculiar pride to be

thought hospitable, and that the same quality of mind which was building a castle on the Hudson, was gratified with the society which his wife's higher accomplishments drew around her.

We pass over the reasons for Forrest's application for divorce under the laws of the State of Pennsylvania, when at the time he was a resident of New York. The legal aspects of the case are not within the province of a biographer. The motives for changing the status of separation, however, show Forrest typically consumed with self-pride. There had passed between husband and wife, since their parting at the Godwin threshold, several public statements. They are revelatory.

I am compelled to address you by reports and rumors that reach me from every side, and which a due respect for my own character compels me not to disregard. You cannot forget that before we parted you obtained from me a solemn pledge that I would say nothing of the guilty cause, the guilt alone on your part — not on mine — which led to our separation; you cannot forget that at the same time you also pledged yourself to a like silence, a silence that I supposed you would be glad to have preserved. But I understand, from various sources, and in ways that cannot deceive me, that you have repeatedly disregarded that promise, and are constantly assigning false reasons for our separation, and making statements in regard to it, intended and calculated to exonerate yourself and to throw the whole blame on me, and necessarily to alienate from me the respect and attachment of the friends I have left to me. Is this a fitting return for the kindness I have ever shown you? Is this your

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gratitude to one who, though aware of your guilt, and most deeply wronged, has endeavored to shield you from the scorn and contempt of the world? The evidence of your guilt you know is in my possession. I took that evidence from among your papers, and I have your own acknowledgment by whom it was written, and that the infamous letter was addressed to you. You know as well as I do that the cause of my leaving you was the conviction of your infidelity. I have said enough to make the object of this letter apparent. I am content that the past shall remain in silence, but I do not intend, nor will I permit, that either you or any one connected with you shall ascribe our separation to my misconduct. I desire you, therefore, to let me know at once whether you have, by your own assertions, or by sanctioning those of others, endeavored to throw the blame of our miserable position on me. My future conduct will depend on your reply. Once yours,

(Signed)

Edwin Forrest.

New York, December 24, 1849.

I hasten to answer the letter Mr. Stevens has just left with me, with the utmost alacrity, as it affords me at least the melancholy satisfaction of correcting misstatements, and of assuring you that the various rumors and reports which have reached you are false.

You say that you have been told that I am "constantly assigning false reasons for our separation, and making statements in regard to it intended and calculated to exonerate myself, and to throw the whole blame on you"; this I beg most distinctly to state is *utterly untrue*.

I have, when asked the cause of our sad differences, invariably replied, that was a matter known only to ourselves, and which would *never* be explained; and I neither

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acknowledge the right of the world, nor of our most intimate friends, to question our conduct in this affair.

You say "I desire you, therefore, to let me know at once whether you have, by your own assertions, or by sanctioning those of others, endeavored to throw the blame of our miserable position on me." I most solemnly assert that I have never done so, directly or indirectly, nor has any one connected with me ever made such assertions with my knowledge, nor have I ever permitted *any one* to speak of you in my presence with censure or disrespect. I am glad you have enabled me to reply directly to yourself concerning this, as it must be evident to you that we are both in a position to be misrepresented to each other; but I cannot help adding that the tone of your letter wounds me deeply; a few months ago you would not have written thus. But in this neither do I blame *you*, but those who have for their own motives poisoned your mind against me — this is surely an unnecessary addition to my sufferings; but, while I suffer, I feel the strong conviction that some day, perhaps one so distant that it may no longer be possible for us to meet on this earth, your own naturally noble and just mind will do me justice, and that you will believe in the affection which for twelve years has never swerved from you. I cannot, nor would I endeavor, to subscribe myself other than

Yours, now and ever,

(Signed)

Catherine Forrest.

December 24, 1849.

Saturday, December 29th.

In replying to the letter I received from you on Monday last, I confined myself simply to an answer to the questions you therein asked me; for, inasmuch as you said

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you were content that the past should remain in silence, and as I was unwilling to revive any subject of dispute between us, I passed over the harsh and new accusations contained in your letter; but, on reading and weighing it carefully, as I have done since, I fear that my silence would be construed into an implied assent to those accusations. After your repeated assurances to me, prior to our separation, and to others since then, of your conviction that there had been nothing criminal on my part, I am pained that you should have been persuaded to use such language to me. You know as well as I do that there has been nothing in my conduct to justify those gross and unexpected charges, and I cannot think why you should now seem to consider a foolish and anonymous letter as an evidence of guilt, never before having thought so, unless you have ulterior views and seek to found some grounds on this for divorce; if this be your object, it could be more easily, not to say more generously, obtained. I repeatedly told you that if a divorce would make you more happy, I was willing to go out of this State with you to obtain it, and that at any future time my promise to this effect would hold good; you said such was not your wish, and that we needed no court of law to decide our future position for us. From the time you proposed our separation I used no remonstrance save to implore you to weigh the matter seriously, and be sure, before you decided, that such a step would make you happy; you said it would, and to conduce as much as lay in my power to that happiness, was my only aim and employment until the day you took me from our home. Of my own desolate and prospectless future, I scarcely dared to think or speak to you, but once you said that if any one dared to cast an imputation upon me not con-

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sistent with honor, I should call on you to defend me. That you should therefore now write and speak as you do, I can only impute to your yielding to the suggestions of those who, under the garb of friendship, are daring to interfere between us; but it is not in their power to know whether your happiness will be insured by endeavoring to work my utter ruin. I cannot believe it; and implore you, Edwin, for God's sake, to trust to your own better judgment; and, as I am certain that your heart will tell you I could not seek to injure you, so, likewise, I am sure your future will not be brighter if you succeed in crushing me more completely, in casting disgrace upon one, who has known no higher pride than the right of calling herself your wife.

(Signed)

Catherine Forrest.

I answer your letter dated the 29th, and received by me on the 31st ultimo, solely to prevent my silence from being misunderstood.

Mr. Godwin has told me that the tardy reply to the most material part of mine of the 24th, was sent by his advice. I should indeed think, from its whole tone and character, that it was written under instructions. I do not desire to use harsh epithets or severe language to you; it can do no good. But you compel me to say that all the important parts of yours are utterly untrue. It is utterly untrue that the accusations I now bring against you are new. It is utterly untrue that since the discovery of that infamous letter, which you so callously called "foolish", I have ever in any way expressed my belief of your freedom from guilt. I could not have done so, and you know that I have not done it. But I cannot carry on a correspondence of this kind. I have no desire to injure or crush you; the fatal wrong has been done

### A TRIAL BY JURY

to me, and I only wish to put a final termination to a state of things which has destroyed my peace of mind, and which is wearing out my life.

(Signed)

Edwin Forrest.

New York, January 2d., 1850.

But before this, as we have noted, Catherine Sinclair wrote her important letter which showed somewhat the emotional storm she was passing through under the exacting eye of Edwin Forrest. The American Eagle was not an easy bird to live with, even though its strength was magnificent. The missive was addressed to Lawson.

Chicago, June 11 [1848].

My dear Sir:—

It has been a question with me for some days, whether I should reply to the letter I received from you in Pittsburg, or leave the matter you therein write about for future discussion; but as a chance for that seems somewhat remote, I will for a few moments tax your well-known patience.

In referring to my letter from New Orleans, you speak as though I had written you a treatise on the rights of woman, and the doctrines of Fourier; if I err not greatly, I neither mentioned one nor other of those topics, for indeed I had half determined never to discuss them with you again. I remember telling you in my letter that I had greatly enjoyed the society I had met in New Orleans, especially that of some intellectual persons. When I enquired of you in my letter from Pittsburg what you thought of Fourier's system now, of course I could only refer to such portion of it as has been influential in bringing about the great change in France, such as refers to the

organization of labor, &c., &c., and which all those whose minds keep pace with the progress of the age, regard as the only means for ameliorating the condition not only of the probatory but of the great mass of mankind suffering from the pressure of the past. Had any one else written as you do, I should be apt to suspect that he had received his ideas of Fourier from some such source as the *New York Herald*, whose editor, lacking capacity to comprehend a system so vast and profound, as well as so ennobling to humanity, has selected only what he conceives to be the most vulnerable portion of the doctrines of association, and indulges in a wholesale denunciation of the immoralities which his prurient mind alone can discover. I do not for a moment think that the most enthusiastic follower of Fourier expects the people of the present age to throw off all the ties of society, and social life, and attempt to carry out in all respects the views of this great man; there are few, very few persons, who have thought out these matters sufficiently to be prepared for such a change, and it is the mission of those few to prepare the way for the coming generations of the earth. The disciples of Fourier do not desire the subversion of all social order; this is one of the many slanders which attach to them as well as to all other reformers, and which it is not worth while to refute. All improvements, social or political, must be accomplished by degrees. Our minds must be educated up to the appreciation of the doctrines of a man whom we must admit was like many of the greatest benefactors of the human race, in advance of his age, and by education only can we hope to bring his views successfully into practice; for to attempt to bring the present generation at once into association with all the bigotry, selfishness, and deeply-rooted prejudices

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which many people hug so closely, would be as absurd as to take the poor Indian from his wilderness, and expect him to be happy in civilization; and yet you will not, I am sure, tell me that the life of the savage is the best. It is impossible, my dear friend, that the wonderful change which has taken place in men's minds, within the last ten years, can have escaped the notice of so acute an observer as you are, and, if you have read the works which the great men of Europe have given us within that time, you have found they all tend to illustrate the great principle of progress, and to show, at the same time, that for man to attain the high position for which he is by nature fitted, woman must keep pace with him. "Man cannot be free if woman be a slave," so writes a mighty mind. You say, "The rights of woman, whether as maid or wife, and all these notions I utterly abhor." I do not quite understand what you here mean by the rights of woman. You cannot mean that she has none. The poorest and most abject thing of earth has some rights; but, if you mean the right to outrage the laws of nature by running out of her own sphere, and seeking to place herself in a position for which she is unfitted, then I perfectly agree with you, and think a woman has no more business in the halls of legislature than a man has in those portions of his house devoted to domestic affairs. At the same time, woman has as high a mission to perform in this world as man has; and he never can hold his place in the ranks of progression and improvement who seeks to degrade woman to a mere domestic animal. Nature intended her for his companion, and him for hers, and without the respect which places her socially and intellectually on the same platform, his love for her personally is an insult. Again you say: "A man loves her as much for her very

dependence on him as for her beauty and loveliness" — (Intellect snugly put out of the question). This remark from you astonished me so much, that I submitted the question at once to Forrest, who instantly agreed with me that for once our good friend was decidedly wrong. (Pardon the heresay; I only say for once.) What! do you value the love of a woman who only clings to you, because she cannot do without your support? Why, this is what in nursery days we used to call "cupboard love", and value accordingly. Depend upon it, as a general rule, there would be fewer family jars, if each were pecuniarily independent of the other. With regard to mutual confidence, I perfectly agree with you that it should exist; but for this there must be mutual sympathy; the relative position of man and wife must be that of companions — not mastery on one side, and dependence on the other. Again you say: "A wife if she blame her husband for seeking after new fancies, should examine her own heart and see if she find not, in some measure, justification for him." Truly, my dear friend, I think so too (when we do agree, our unanimity is wonderful!), and if, after that self-examination, she finds the fault is hers, she should amend it; but, if she finds, on reflection, that her whole course has been one of devotion and affection for him, she must even let matters take their course; and rest assured, if he be a man of appreciative mind, his affection for her will return. This is rather a degrading position, but a true woman has pride in self-sacrifice. In any case, I do not think a woman should blame a man for indulging his fancies. I think we discussed this once before, and that I then said, as I do now, that he is to blame when these fancies are degrading, or for an unworthy object; the last words I mean not to apply



*From the Albert Davis Collection*

CATHERINE N. SINCLAIR

(MRS. EDWIN FORREST)



## A TRIAL BY JURY

morally, but intellectually. A sensible woman who loves her husband in the true spirit of love, without selfishness, desires to see him happy, and rejoices in his elevation. She would grieve that he should give the world cause to talk, or in any way risk the loss of that respect due to both himself and her; but she would infinitely rather that he should indulge "new fancies" (I quote you), than lead an unhappy life of self-denial, and unrest, feeling, each day, the weight of his chains become more irksome, making him, in fact, a living lie. This is what society demands of us; in our present state we cannot openly brave its laws; but it is a despotism which cannot exist forever; and, in the meantime, those whose minds soar above common prejudice, can, if such be united, do much to make their present state endurable. It is a fearful thing to think of the numbers who, after a brief acquaintance, during which they can form no estimate of each other's characters, swear solemnly to love each other while they "on this earth do dwell." Men and women boldly make this vow, as though they could, by the magic of these few words, enchain forever every feeling and passion of their nature. It's absurd. No man can do so; and society, as though it had made a compact with the devil, to make man commit more sins than his nature would otherwise prompt, says:—"Now you are fairly in the trap; seek to get out, and we cast you off forever—you and your helpless children." Man never was made to endure even such a yoke as unwise governments have sought to lay on him; how much more galling, then, must be that which seeks to bind the noblest feelings and affections of his nature, and make him

"So, with one chain'd friend, perhaps a jealous foe,  
The dreariest and the longest journey go."

## THE FABULOUS FORREST

That there is any necessity to ensure, by any means, a woman's happiness, is a proposition you do not seem to have entertained while writing your letter of May 24th, but, perhaps, we are supposed to be happy under all circumstances. I shall scarcely dare to hope you will pardon me for taking up so much of your time as it will need to read this; but you will please remember that I have bestowed an equal time in writing to you, and I will add that there is no other one of my friends on whom I would, at this time, expend so much. Pray let me have a line from you first, to say I am forgiven for the trespass; not that I would ask you to answer this, for I have no desire to write again on these subjects, — but just to let one know how the world is jogging on with you. Your reply will reach me at Detroit, if it be there before the 4th of July, and afterwards at Buffalo.

Forrest commenced here on Thursday last, and has had very good houses. I suppose he will play till the 23d. We received the *Evening Post*. *Grand merci, mon ami.* Of course I hope you will receive this letter merely as a sort of discussion among friends who desire to know each other's opinions. I read it to Forrest, and he agrees perfectly with all I have said. We shall be very glad to get home; indeed, I may say I am as much tired as he is. Since we left New Orleans, I cannot say I have enjoyed anything except a few hours with Magoon, and hearing him preach. I hope you heard him in New York. I trust averages are "looking up", and that you are once more in a cheerful mood.

None wish you more success than your friend,

C. N. F.

Willis, in his *Home Journal* article, already referred to, did not forbear to accuse Forrest of the grossest

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conduct, due to his insensible notions of what was the proper gentlemanly conduct due to a "lady." His approach of the subject is very representative of the fabulous morality which was rampant during these fabulous years of national development. If such testimony as Forrest gathered was justifiable, then, according to Willis, "we feel that there is not a lady in New York safe from destruction by the easy conspiracy of vile men, nor a gentleman's house, waited on by servants, where the hospitality may not be sworn to as debauchery."

Such monstrous behavior as Forrest showed, concludes Willis, is but another instance of his consuming egotism, of his desire to pose as the wronged husband, in order to secure public sympathy. When, however, the question of a money settlement became imperative by order of law, the penurious side of Forrest was wounded to the quick, and he fought to escape the legal incubus. In fine, Willis said :

Mr. Forrest's ruling ambition is to lord it over his fellows. He married, from pride only, a woman of lofty mien, suited to show well as the mate of a "nature's nobleman." Soon recognizing that her intellect was naturally superior to his own, and her education a superiority still more impossible to overtake, he gave up playing the lover, using her to figure only for his vanity, and seeking sympathy and companionship elsewhere. *Her* necessity for companionship and sympathy expending itself, meantime, in respectable association with the refined and gifted whom she drew as society around her — and Mr. Forrest, feeling that she shone, in this sphere,

without him — his temper soured, he became morose and violent, and nothing but her absolute good breeding and forbearance prevented a separation long ago. With the same pride of character which makes it impossible that she could ever have descended to what she is charged with in the evidence, Mrs. Forrest is lofty in her judgments, and independent, though gentle, in the expression of her opinions. Quiet instances of this were always occurring; but a steady and even-minded difference from her husband, *as to his conduct towards Macready* during the troubles of last year, brought his intolerance of her superiority to a head, and he resolved on separation.

The lion and the mouse were in dangerously close proximity, and had Willis been wise he would have avoided any further possible words on the subject. But the lion was smoldering in anger, and it so happened that one morning in New York (June 17, 1850), on Fifth Avenue below Fourteenth Street, his path crossed with that of the mouse and the natural outburst happened. The lion horsewhipped the mouse on the public street. Two legal battles resulted from this: Willis charging assault and battery; Forrest suing on the score of libel. The jury decision gave Willis twenty-five hundred dollars damages and costs; there is little doubt that the onslaught upon him was of a nature that offered him little time in which to defend himself. As he wrote to one of his witnesses:

Forrest, of course, will try to disprove the cowardly manner of the attack, and your evidence may be important. We have four or five witnesses (of whom my

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counsel is unwilling to publish the evidence till the trial comes on, from the handle it gives to his well-known system of bribery), and they have all made affidavit to the stealthy approach and the blow on the back of the neck. A physician, who examined me, will testify also to there being no mark on face or breast. So that he is pretty sure to have the disgraceful truth proved on him.

It is well to drop the divorce here: it suggests nothing more to our portrait of Forrest, and has already added deep stains upon whatever warm colors may be on the canvas. There was not a moment during the proceedings when, had he possessed temperance, he could not have brought a stop to the affair and reached a wise understanding with his wife. But he was seeing red: his philosophy of Hate had full possession of him; he was posing as the injured husband. When he finally succumbed to a realization that the whole trend of affairs was against him, it was the year 1868, and he had become an old man. His whole frame quivered at the bare mention of the name of Jamieson, at any reference to Mrs. Forrest's counsel, Charles O'Conor. Yet though, as Winter suggests, he may have reviled Catherine Sinclair, there was always a pang of suffering whenever he recalled her. His little pocket Journal, which I have seen, contains one entry — a pathetic line — written after the divorce: "Saw Vandenhoff and Mrs. Sinclair together."

The same little book contains other memoranda — for instance this quotation:

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“Deep in my heart was fixed one stainless shrine  
At which my inmost soul did bend in worship.”

Mayhap he had in mind his mother, but it would not be inconsistent to believe that in his loneliness he may have meant his wife. Whichever way one reviews the divorce proceedings, there is brought forcibly to mind the conviction that it was willed and maneuvered by Forrest himself. He stands the most culpable figure in the whole proceedings. A scrap of one of Forrest's letters is preserved in the library of The Players. It reads: “A great wrong has been done, and to prevent a repetition of it—the offenders should be scourged, and what scourging is so effective as to keep the names of these ermined tyrants, a mockery and a scorn forever in the mouths of men.” For over twenty years the scourge was to lay heavy on Forrest's shoulders: disappointment and hate and loneliness were to pursue him to the end of his days.

## CHAPTER XIII

### “AND ALL BUT HE DEPARTED”: “I WILL CON- TEND WITH MINE ENEMIES”

Forrest exhibited all the infuriated pride of a defeated man. There were but two comforts left him: his men friends and work, hard work, where he could appear before his public and show them what he was, — as an artist and a man. He could not see that the latter had lost ground; but he *knew* that as an actor there was but one Forrest, and the theatre needed him. Even in the midst of the travail of litigation, he began playing again. While the trial was being conducted, he appeared at the Broadway Theatre, on September 15, 1851, for a short engagement. He was again seen in New York for sixty-nine nights, beginning February 9, 1852, as *Damon*, and Barrett is authority for the statement that in the audience was Forrest's friend, Ryn-ders, who caused to have unfurled a banner which spurred on the crowded house to vociferous applause. For thereon were emblazoned the words: “This is the people's verdict.” Forrest answered with a speech; to him the crowded house meant complete vindication; he would not take it otherwise. This was the commencement of his dying hard. He said:

Instinctively I ask myself the question, Why is this vast assemblage here tonight, composed as it is of the intelligent, the high-minded, the right-minded, and last, though not least, the beautiful of the Empire City? Is it because a favorite actor appears in a favorite character? No, the actor and the performances are as familiar to you as household words. Why, then, this unusual ferment? It is because you have come to express your irrepressible sympathy for one whom you know to be a deeply-injured man. Nay, more, you are here with a higher and a holier purpose, — to vindicate the principle of even-handed justice. I do not propose to examine the proceedings of the late unhappy trial; those proceedings are now before you, and before the world, and you can judge as rightly of them as I can. I have no desire to instruct you in the verdict you shall render. The issue of that trial will yet be before the court, and I shall patiently await the judgment of that court, be it what it may. In the meanwhile, I submit my cause to you, — my cause, did I say? — no, not my cause alone, but yours, the cause of every man in the community, the cause of every human being, the cause of every honest wife, the cause of every virtuous woman, the cause of every one who cherishes a home and the pure spirit which should abide there. Ladies and gentlemen, I submit my cause to a tribunal uncorrupt and incorruptible; I submit it to the sober second thought of the people. A little while since, and I thought my pathway of life was filled with thorns; you have this night filled it with roses [looking at the bouquets at his feet]. Their perfume is gratifying to the senses, and I am grateful for your beautiful and fragrant offering.

It was indeed a memorable engagement, one that lasted an unprecedented length of time, and when

the fiftieth night arrived, not only was the theatre illuminated with transparencies, but people in their dwellings near by hung out flags and lanterns in recognition of an auspicious event. The theatre, before the advent of commercial policies, was a very personal concern. We recall the exciting prints commemorating the farewell engagement of Charlotte Cushman, when she was escorted through the streets of New York by a formidable procession of admirers, and, from the balcony of the old and famous Fifth Avenue Hotel, watched fireworks and special display “sets” in her honor. Forrest was accustomed to such ovations. Through the country there were always enthusiastic supporters who would go the very limit of celebration in their recognition of him as an actor. He was facing a time when a western State would ask him officially to be its guest.

This very month of February, 1852, witnessed the first essayal of Catherine Sinclair on the stage. Both parties in the divorce sensation were making capital out of the event. But, undoubtedly, money necessity forced Mrs. Sinclair, as she was called, to seek some professional income. She put herself under the rigorous tutelage of the actor, George Vandenhoff. It would have been fortunate for her, indeed, had her family held to their contention that a marriage dowry was a necessary part of the marriage agreement. The trial details show that Mrs. Forrest had not been entirely separated from her family; that probably a few of the many thorns

in the side of Forrest were Mrs. Forrest's sisters, who came over from England and shared in her social life. But now, not even her family could meet the immediate necessity, so that the stage seemed the logical resort. How often, to retrieve a fortune, has the stage seen driven to it those who had given, at first, no thought to it for themselves. Recall the phenomenal appearance of Anna Cora Mowatt! What would have been the outcome had Mrs. Forrest gone on the stage at the time of her marriage, and appeared in support of her husband? Forrest could have brooked no sharing of honors with any one; nor would he have allowed that any but himself should be the breadwinner. It would have been goading to him, the very thought of his wife being financially independent. And she herself would have acceded to his point of view. We are somewhat surprised to find her accepting, in her letter regarding Woman's Rights, the double standard of morality. Yet she was a product of her age, not so revolutionary as to reject some of its accepted codes. Nevertheless, she was overstepping one of them now, for it was not generally approved that a woman should earn her living by other methods than by her needle or by domestic work. The professionalism of Mrs. Forrest's family, however, was an excuse for her. And the publicity she had been subjected to might aid her in attracting the public to her.

Through an introduction from Captain Granby Calcraft, who was one of the victims of Forrest's

jealousy, Catherine Sinclair was brought to the notice of Vandenhoff, who has written :

Mrs. Forrest wished to go on the stage; she needed preparation; she could not pay for it; but it was probable that public curiosity would render her engagements highly profitable; and, in consideration of my instructions, and also of my performing with her, I was to be allowed an equal share of the profits which her temporary and factitious attraction would secure.

Her opening was on February 22, 1852, as *Lady Teazle*. Vandenhoff insisted on this. To him it was “*the one (part) of all others in which her appearance, style and general capabilities would make the best impression. . . . It was the most artistic performance she ever achieved: the one in which her personal requisites and her education stood her in the best stead. She never played any other part as easily, as unaffectedly, or with as much success with the public.*” Her repertory consisted of *Pauline*, *Margaret Elmore*, *Lady Mabel* and *Beatrice*. In his “*An Actor’s Note-Book*”, Vandenhoff shows how he became financially the loser by the engagement, for we are given to realize that Catherine Sinclair Forrest was not the great drawing card it was supposed she would be; the conservative part of society could not brook the savor of divorce notoriety about her. Besides which, she was not an actress to the manner born. She toured Boston and Albany, and went as far west as California; she also ventured to Australia. From our narrative she disappears, except in so far as Forrest found it diffi-

cult to manage his estate because of claims upon it made by her at different times.<sup>1</sup>

Work revived Forrest from the depression that had descended upon him. When he had completed his sixty-ninth performance, he faced his audience with grateful appreciation of their support. He came to the footlights and told them so.

... I have been called, by your acclamations, to the spot where I now stand to receive the generous plaudits of your hands, and I may say hands with hearts in them. No popular assembly, in my opinion, utters the public voice with more freedom and with more truth than the assembly usually convened within the walls of a theatre. If this be so, I have reason to be greatly proud of the demonstration which for twelve successive weeks has greeted me here. Such a demonstration any man ought to be proud of. Such a demonstration eloquently vindicates the thought of the great poet:

“Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like the toad, though ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.”

... Such a demonstration contains in it an unmistakable moral. Such a demonstration vindicates me more than a thousand verdicts, for it springs from those who make and unmake judges.

There were other engagements Forrest filled in New York, like those of September 20, 1852, February 24, 1853, and April 17, 1854. Out of his weakness, he seemed to rise into new professional strength,

<sup>1</sup> For an account of Catherine Sinclair, see a Memoir by George Morton, *New York Clipper*. She died June 9, 1891.

and he found a public ready to receive him. On May 29, 1855, he played *Damon* for the benefit of his old friend, J. W. Wallack, Senior. On this occasion, his *Pythias* was Davenport, with whom Forrest was now not on speaking terms. There had been a quarrel regarding the play, “Jack Cade”, for, this very year of 1855, Conrad, not believing that the great actor had exclusive control of the property, had offered the script to Davenport. Forrest had vigorously protested, even though he held Davenport as an artist in great regard. And the latter had worshipped at the feet of the older actor. Had Davenport not declared, in 1854, after he had played *Othello* at the Broadway Theatre (September 11) :

I well know that others have preceded me of far greater merit and more experience, and one in particular, whose recent triumphs on these very boards have proved his greatness, whose transcendent genius and talent have made him the darling of his countrymen; for they can point to him and challenge the world to produce his equal.

Yet now, Forrest, rather than mention Davenport’s name, while rehearsing *Damon*, pointed at him with scornful indifference. In the matter of protecting his play rights, Forrest found that possession was truly nine points of the law; but he was extravagant in the use of his friends and in their destruction. The sequel to this quarrel is a pathetic dialogue preserved by the Boston *Transcript* in 1894. The beloved William Warren and Davenport are the characters.

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Mr. Warren took a seat at the table, adjusted his gold eyeglasses, looked quizzically at Davenport, and said:

"Ned, I believe you and Forrest were not good friends?"

"No, we were not. Why do you ask?"

"Because this is the anniversary of his death, and I was going to propose a toast, in silence."

"Let it be so, sir," replied Davenport, catching the sentiment of the comedian.

The glasses were raised, and Mr. Warren said slowly:

"Here's to the memory of a great actor, a grand soul, a good fellow."

"Amen!" murmured Davenport.

Another notable appearance of Forrest during this year, 1855, was as *Claude Melnotte* to the *Pauline* of Mrs. Richardson; while Charlotte Cushman, in the cast with Placide, Richings and Wheatley, vitalized the insignificant part of the *Widow Melnotte*.

It was during the year 1857 that he received his first invitation from the State of California to visit the West. The official communication was signed by the Governor, the Lieutenant-Governor, the Treasurer, the Secretary of State, members of the Senate and the House and others. It ran as follows:

State Capitol, Sacramento, April 20, 1857.

Respected Sir, — The undersigned, State officers and members of the Senate and Assembly, a small portion of your many admirers on the coast of the Pacific, avail themselves of this, the only mode under their control, of signifying to you the very high estimation as a gentleman

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and an actor in which you are generally and universally held by all who have a taste for the legitimate drama. Genuine taste and rigid criticism have united with the verdict of impartial history to pronounce you the head and leader of the noble profession to which you have consecrated abilities that would in any sphere of life render you eminent. We believe that so long as Shakspere is remembered and his words revered, your name, too, will be remembered with pride by all who glory in the triumphs of our Saxon literature.

In conclusion, permit us to express the hope that your existing engagements will so far coincide with our wishes as to permit us at an early day to welcome you to the shores of the Pacific, assuring you of a warm and sincere reception, so far as our efforts can accomplish the same; and we feel that we but express the feelings of every good citizen of the State.

In these modern days, official calls are made upon the presiding heads of government in city, State and nation. But it would be an unprecedented thing for lawmakers so to arrange their business as to keep it from interfering with an engagement of an actor who happened to be in the locality. Forrest had right to feel elation that nothing had disturbed his position as head of his profession. His answer showed due stately pleasure. He did not, however, give the real cause of his present declination. The condition of his health was the disturbing factor. His reply ran as follows:

Philadelphia, July 10, 1857.

Gentlemen, — With a grateful pleasure I acknowledge your communication of April 20th, delivered to me a short

time since by the hands of Mr. Maguire. Your flattering invitation, so generously bestowed and so gracefully expressed, to enter the Golden Gate and visit your beautiful land, is one of the highest compliments I have ever received. It is an honor, I venture to say, that was never before conferred on one of my profession.

It comes not from the lovers of the drama or men of letters merely, but from the Executive, the Representatives, and other high officials of a great State of the American Confederacy, and I shall ever regard it as one of the proudest compliments in all my professional career.

Believe me, I deeply feel this mark of your kindness, not as mere incense to professional or personal vanity, but as a proud tribute to that art which I have loved so well and followed so long.

“The youngest of the Sister Arts,  
Where all their beauty blends.”

This art, permit me to add, from my youth I have sought personally to elevate and professionally to improve, more from the truths in nature’s infallible volume than from the pedantic words of the schools,— a volume open to all, and which needs neither Greek nor Latin lore to be understood.

And now, gentlemen, although I greatly regret that it is not in my power to accept your invitation, I sincerely trust there will be a “time for such a word”, when we may yet meet together under the roof of one of those proud temples consecrated to the drama by the taste and the munificence of your fellow-citizens.

Despite the flaunted fitness of Forrest’s physical condition, he had at various times of his life been subject to serious attacks of sickness. He was ever

particular in the care he gave himself, but there was always lurking in his system certain inherited weaknesses upon which his violent energy and his continued turmoil of mind and spirit made great drain. It was in 1856 that he was stricken with a combination of gout and inflammatory rheumatism inherited from his maternal grandfather. He retired for five years, filling the theatre world with speculation as to whether or not he would ever again return to the stage. He had once before, during the ordeals of his divorce trial, 1849-1852, relinquished his work, but now his condition was more serious than it had ever been before. Oakes watched over him with keen solicitude and showed him where a protracted rest was necessary.

It was during this time that he gave himself up to a concentrated period of study, and what his friends called philosophic thought.

Alger claims that Forrest found greatest satisfaction in books like Motley’s “Netherlands”, Grimm’s “Life of Michael Angelo”, and Hawkins’s “Life of Kean.” And his taste for literature is further revealed in this extract from a letter written in June, 1870:

I will read Forster’s “Life of Walter Savage Landor”, of which you speak, at my first leisure; though I consider Forster personally to be a snob. You will find among my papers in your possession exactly what I think of him. For Landor, even as a boy, I had a great admiration. I sate with wonder while I quaffed instruction at the shrine of his genius. There is a book just published in England

which I shall devour with an insatiable mental appetite. It is called "Benedict Spinoza, his Life, Correspondence, and Ethics." It is the first time that his works have been collected and published in English. So that I shall have a rare treat. His "Ethics" I have read in a French translation which I found in Paris years ago; and its perusal divided my time between the pleasures of the town and the intellectual culture which the study of his sublime philosophy gave me. It was called "Spinoza's Ethics; or, Man's Revelation to Man of the Dealings of God with the World."

His own personal concern in the symptoms of his particular disease added to an early interest he had shown in medicine. The unfortunate thing was that Forrest did not know moderation, did not spare himself in the least, even when, during the last years of his life, a paralysis of the sciatic nerve lamed him. His nervous power was still his, but the body was broken.

It would have been well for Forrest if, during this enforced retirement, he had planned to give up the stage and devote himself to the less exacting series of public readings, to which he finally resorted. There were many qualities in him which found healthy outlet during these hours of what to him was idleness. He gave encouragement to his love of books, his love of art, his love of nature. Having lost his home on the Hudson, with all its dreams, he built up other homes, upon which he lavished thought and unabating care. Even toward the end of his life, when he was traveling, he would send home

instructions what to do in the gardens, in the stables, about the houses which he owned in city and country. The unrequited domestic comfort was not to dupe him, to cheat him. He *would* be lord of the manor and have his friends around him.

In his retirement, people became curious as to his every move. The papers were busy with unfounded reports; his most intimate convictions were speculated upon; sometimes he would answer them for his own intellectual satisfaction; while, again, he would let the public wonder. Forrest was not a conventionally religious man, yet he was always thoughtful on the subject of belief. His early friend, the Reverend Doctor Pilmore, had given him his foundations, and, in later life, his interest did not abate whenever a religious question confronted him. In 1837, after his return from Europe, and after his purchase of a home in New York, he held a pew in the Unitarian church of the Reverend Orville Dewey. Alger is reticent as to the real character of Forrest's religion, though acknowledging his reverence before a Supreme Power. We know that mistaken piety drew from Forrest quick and fiery retort, as, for instance, when a minister wrote him, expressing a desire to see him in “King Lear”, provided he could come to the theatre and be unseen. Like Booth and Jefferson, Forrest was alert to defend the theatre from such false witnesses.

At this time, in view of a religious revival which was being conducted, the report was circulated that Forrest had been “converted”, and his friend, the

Reverend E. L. Magoon, who had been a witness in the divorce case, wrote him, expressing satisfaction, if it were true. To which Forrest made reply:

But in answer to your questions, my good friend, — for I know you are animated only by a sincere regard for my spiritual as well as for my temporal welfare, — I am happy to assure you that the painful attack of inflammatory rheumatism, with which for the last three months I have combatted, is now quite overcome, and I think I may safely say that, with the return of more genial weather, I shall be restored once more to a sound pristine health.

Then, for the state of my mind; I do not know the time since, when a boy, I blew sportive bladders in the beamy sun, that it ever was so tranquil and serene as in the present hour. Having profited by the leisure given me by my lengthened illness seriously to review the past and carefully consider the future, both for time and for eternity, I have, with a chastened spirit, beheld with many regrets that there was much in the past that might have been improved — more, perhaps, in the acts of omission than in acts of commission; for I feel sustained that my whole conduct has been actuated solely by an honest desire to adhere strictly to the rule of right; that the past has been characterized as I trust the future will be — to love my friends; to hate my enemies — for I cannot be a hypocrite — and to live in accordance with the Divine precept: “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”

And now for that “higher welfare” of which you speak, I can only say that, believing as I sincerely do, in the justice, the mercy, the wisdom, and the love of Him who knoweth the secrets of our hearts, I hope I may with



Photo Sarony. Albert Davis Collection

FORREST AS CORIOLANUS

*"So admirable was this delineation, that the spectator lost sight of the actor . . . thought only of Coriolanus."*

— HON. WILLIAM B. MACLAY



“AND ALL BUT HE DEPARTED”

“An unfaltering trust approach my grave,  
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.”

This declaration of faith was not quickly framed. In none of Forrest's personal problems were conclusions hastily reached. Not even in his artistic quandaries was he apt to accept a snap judgment; he depended largely upon such a friend as James Rees to give him the benefit of his own systematic researches. But he thought things out for himself. So, in religious matters he was sincerely earnest. Toward the end of his life, he was asked about immortality. Alger quotes from a Forrest letter, written in 1866:

There is a great consolation in the sincere belief in the immortality of the soul. If I could honestly and reasonably entertain such faith, that the love and friendship of today will extend through all time with renewed devotion, death would have no sting and the grave no victory. I quite envied the closing hours of Senator Foote the other day. He was so serenely confident of seeing all his friends again, that by the perishing light of his fervid brain he seemed for a moment to realize the illusion of his earth-taught faith.

But, whatever ideas he might have possessed regarding the rending of the ties of friendship, he clung to them as a lonely man. And there were many beautiful associations connected with the checkered career of Edwin Forrest.

Forrest's greatest friendship was with James Oakes, the Boston merchant of the old Salt Store;

their temperaments, their dispositions, their tastes were much alike. In both, the characteristic of blunt outspokenness had won them enemies. Yet their fealty was unshakable in directions where their sympathies were won. They had first met in Boston when Forrest was twenty-one, and Oakes one year his junior; every summer for three decades they had passed a fortnight's vacation together, and it had become a habit for the actor to turn to Oakes for consultation on all points. Alger paints a full canvas of this Damon and Pythias association; he recalls how, when the farm was bought at Covington, opposite Cincinnati, on Forrest Hill, the main roadway was named Oakes Avenue; he noted that at Springbrook, the room opposite Forrest's was christened Oakes' Chamber; he records that in the Broad Street house, there were pictures of Oakes hanging on the walls of the entry hall, the dining room, the picture gallery, the library. If any one could persuade Forrest to do a thing it was Oakes, and the committee seeking to have made a marble statue of him in the rôle of *Coriolanus* turned to Oakes for aid; and when finally the sculptor, Thomas Ball, completed his work, and the finished figure was shipped from Florence, it was Oakes who proclaimed it a speaking likeness. He too could rise to classic avowals of love, as he did in writing to the artist.

For more than forty years [he asserted] I have known this man with an intimacy not common among men. Indeed, our friendship has been more like the devotion of a man to the woman he loves than the relations usually

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subsisting between men. In all my intercourse with the world I have never known a truer man or one with a nobler nature than Edwin Forrest. . . .

In the same strains of admiration and praise wrote James A. Herne, who felt it necessary some years after to send a letter to the press defending Forrest against the bitter attacks of William Winter, the critic.

Upon Leggett and Oakes, Forrest centred his generous affection lavishly. In the final days of the young, impulsive editor, it was the actor who came to his financial rescue when he was laden with debt (though his political enemies tried to represent the matter otherwise); when Oakes in 1870 announced his retirement from business, Forrest wrote from Macon, Georgia, “I look forward with a loving impatience to the end of my professional engagements this season, that I may repair to Philadelphia, there to effect a settlement of such comforting means as shall make the residue of your life glide on in ceaseless ease.” Stilted as may seem the expression of his intent, this was Forrest’s sincerest, biggest side. A lonely man with power — so woefully cheated of companionship through his own defects, pouring out the depths of his affection upon those who had the patience to overlook his outbursts. In his home, the dark oaken solidity of his empty rooms made him cry out for companionship. Forrest summoned his friends to him, hungry with the need of them, yet his invitations were still couched in terms of imperious command. Not to Oakes, however. When

he determined to go to California he wrote to the latter: "Is it not *possible* for you to arrange your affairs and go with me? It would make me the happiest man in the world." The unfortunate circumstances of Forrest's life, his prominent position as an actor, his rising prosperity made him a target for all kinds of appeals, and he was quick to respond in sympathy, reviewing the need rather than questioning the character of the person. In consequence he was repeatedly disillusioned by ungratefulness and by a total lack of reciprocal courtesy. Of course he was himself exacting in fealty; he expected friendship to believe in "Forrest — right or wrong", and especially in the Macready and the divorce matters he exacted impossible conditions which his jaundiced eyes could see no reason for declining. But Oakes stood apart, giving him fealty. "You are almost the only intimate friend I have had," wrote Forrest, "who never asked of me a pecuniary favor." "My much loved friend", he called Oakes, who often responded, "My noble Spartacus."

How many there were to whom Forrest was always "Dear Ned." There must have been a magnetic richness to the man!

Forrest returned to the stage at a time of national stress and strain. James M. Nixon signed a contract with him for one hundred nights, three performances a week, through the chief cities of the Union, the actor to receive half the profits. The engagement began at Niblo's Garden, New York, on September 17, 1860, in "Hamlet." Forrest also was seen in

“King Lear”, “Othello”, “Macbeth”, “Richard III”, “The Gladiator”, “Damon and Pythias”, “Richelieu”, “Jack Cade”, “Virginius”, and “Metamora.” In his supporting company were F. B. Conway and his wife, Charles Fisher, and Madame Ponisi. Wherever he went, seats were at a premium. In Philadelphia, they were sold, *à la* Barnum, at auction. The engagement ended January 13, 1862. Manager Wheatley immediately signed him, and again he opened at the Chestnut Street Theatre, in Philadelphia. But all the strain was telling upon him. He grew morose and unapproachable. One evening, during an uproar of applause, some one tried to stop the continued clapping of hands. At the end of the play Forrest, according to Barrett, stepped before the curtain. He asserted vigorously that applause was the actor’s right. “He who would rob him of it would pick a pocket,” he complained.

We do not hear much of the war in the Forrest records, though it is evident, from the success he had, that in the large cities, there was little abatement of theatregoing. Alger preserves an excerpt from a letter, written June, 1861 :

The political aspect of our country is ominous indeed, and yet I hope with you that in the Divine Providence there will be some great good brought out of this evil state of affairs which will prove at last a blessing to our country. Oftentimes from that we consider evil comes a reviving good. I trust it may prove so in this case. I do not, however, condemn the South for their feelings of just

indignation towards the intermeddling abolitionist of the North,— the abolitionist who for years by his incendiary acts has made the homestead of the planter a place of anxiety and unrest instead of peace and tranquility. But I do condemn the leaders of this unwarrantable rebellion, those scurvy politicians who, to serve their own selfish ends, flatter and fool, browbeat and threaten honest people into an attitude which seems to threaten the safety of our glorious Union. I still believe in man's capacity to govern himself, and I prophesy that by September next all our difficulties will be adjusted. The South will know that the North has no hostile, no subversive feelings to gratify, that it is the Union of the States — that Union cemented by the blood of patriot sires — which is to be preserved unbroken and inviolate, and that under its fraternal ægis all discord shall cease, all wounds be healed. To this end we must be ready for the field ; we must gird up our loins and put on our armor ; for a grateful and lasting peace is only won when men are equals in honor and courage. And to this end it gives me pleasure to know that my namesake, your son — has decided to take arms in defence of the Union of the States and the Constitution of our fathers ; and, more, that his good mother, as well as yourself, approves his resolution. Now is the time to test if our Government be really a shield and a protection against anarchy and rebellion, or merely a rope of sand, an illusion, a chimera ; and it is this spontaneous uprising of every friend of freedom rallying around the flag of his country — that sacred symbol of our individual faith — which will proclaim to the world in tones more potent than heaven's thunder-peal that we HAVE a Government stronger and more enduring than that of kings and potentates, be-

cause founded on equal and exact justice, the offspring of man’s holiest and noblest nature, the attribute of God himself.

It was in February, 1865, while playing at the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore, that Forrest’s right sciatic nerve was partially paralyzed, and there settled upon him an obvious lameness which he was never able to overcome, even though he subjected himself to calesthenics in an effort to strengthen himself. He who had prided himself on athletic prowess, who had paid almost ritualistic attention to his body, was outwardly crushed. In January, 1866, he made a triumphal entry into Chicago, writing to Oakes of a full purse and a fuller heart. “Give me joy, my dear and steadfast friend,” he exulted, “that the veteran does *not* lag superfluous on the stage.”

During April of that year, he turned toward San Francisco, landing there on May 3, amidst an ovation, and breathing sentiments of “See America First.” John McCullough accompanied him as his chief support. Upon this actor Forrest lavished his love and affection, and it was upon McCullough’s shoulders that the mantle of the crushed hero was to fall: for, in after years, McCullough continued the Forrest tradition as much as it could possibly be continued, so dependent was it upon Forrest’s own personal characteristics.

San Francisco went wild over the heralded appearance of the great actor. The first ticket sold for five hundred dollars; prices doubled, and the Opera House was packed densely on the evening of May 14,

when Forrest made his bow as *Richelieu*. In Chicago he had drawn, in five nights, \$11,600. He was now to face, during an engagement which was cut short by a serious attack of gout, more than sixty thousand people, and to earn more than twenty thousand dollars in gold. He was a sick man, fighting against odds, and finally was obliged to seek rest and cure outside the theatre. There are letters extant which reveal him revelling in the soft climate and beautiful scenery of California. He had great plans to remain West for the winter, and, as he wrote Oakes, to return home cured of those ills which were daily crippling him. He would have abided by these plans had he not been called East suddenly by reason of his sister Caroline's illness.

The rest of the story of Forrest's life is quickly told. The sands in the hour glass were thinning, and he was fighting to keep the harness firmly to his weakening body. It was the fight of the dominant personality which would not realize the forces against which both the artist and the physical man were fighting.

As in early days, he was still proud of his voice. When, during the summers, he would go with Oakes to Cohasset, he would stand on the beach and address the sea. When, in the quietness of his library, he was with some trusted friends, he would recite the Lord's Prayer, to illustrate the majesty of his reading. But the thought that he should retire was still farthest from him. I have found many little notes, during this period after his return from Cali-

fornia, which show his dependence, not only on Oakes, but on Daniel Dougherty. With the latter he made many a trip to his Springbrook home — which afterwards became the Actor’s Home of his Fonthill dream; there he always found rest and enjoyment. “We shall have roads without dust,” he writes to Dougherty — “fields refreshed by the needed rains — and the golden sunshine to light up the many coloured leaves of Autumn.” We read (February 9, 1869), “I came home this morning at daylight — after riding all night in the railroad cars, jaded and worn from the professional labours of ten consecutive weeks, having acted, in that brief time, in *twenty-two* different towns and cities. I never worked harder in my long life before. How much I need rest.”

He possessed much land and should have retired now. His thoughts were constantly on matters of farming. Even as late as 1870, when he was in Decatur, Alabama, he wrote to his sister, “I wish the fruit trees in the garden to be well manured down to the roots — the soil to be removed for some distance from the trunks, and the place supplied by a well-prepared manure.” Again, from Springfield, Illinois, another line of instruction: “Tell Michael to train the grape vines and the fruit trees in the Garden in Broad Street.” Thus torn between his professional position and his home, Forrest worked against hope, in constant fear of his sciatica, and with haunting dread that maybe he would lose his memory.

His last season was the disillusionizing one. New

ways and new manners were drawing the public against him. He realized this when he played for twenty nights at the old Fourteenth Street Theatre in New York to poor houses. The papers, instead of criticizing him, began to estimate him finally. Some of them were cold-blooded in the realistic statements as to his infirmities, but others gave him his due: from first to last an actor dominated by an intense seriousness of purpose, and a thrilling individuality of will power. They still saw in him a tottering grace and an exquisite modulation of voice in pathos. But the glory of Forrest was fading. And the tragedy was that he would not succumb gracefully, even though he himself was painfully aware of it. It was in the difficult season of 1871-1872, between October 1 and April 4, that he traveled over seven thousand miles, acting in fifty-two places, during one hundred twenty-eight nights, and realizing the sum of \$39,675. He went as far west as Omaha and Kansas City, and had the pleasure of witnessing trainloads of excursionists rushing into the theatres. He went down to New Orleans (November 13, 1871), and expressed his purpose of retiring. The speech showed no abatement of the poseful pride of the man; it was full of inextinguishable courage in the face of encroaching weakness.

Ladies and Gentlemen:—The little bell which told the falling of the curtain also announced my final departure from among you. For the last quarter of a century you have cheered my efforts. From the time that I landed, a nameless stranger among you, until the present period

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— I have been crowned by you with most brilliant success. I wish to change my pursuit — I would not ‘lag superfluous on the stage.’ I have chosen a pursuit congenial to my feelings — that pursuit which the immortal Washington pronounced one of the most noble, most useful ever followed by man — the tilling of the soil. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I have to say that little word, which is often said in this sad, bright world, — “Farewell !”

To take away the gesture and the pose from Edwin Forrest was to rob him of his very sincerity. We are told that when, in 1870, Admiral Farragut’s funeral procession passed up Broadway in New York, Forrest, who was staying at the Metropolitan Hotel, fell on his knees in the presence of Oakes and Alger, and addressed them through his tears on the greatness of historic service. It was his nature to over-accentuate.

On this last tour, Forrest was stricken with pneumonia while playing in Boston. Friend Oakes was the devoted nurse. No one witnessing his performance as *Richelieu* on that evening realized that never again would he act a part in a regular stage performance. After he had been nursed into some semblance of health, he then realized that some sort of retirement was essential. Yet not entirely so, for he began to give heed to the urgent requests from friends that he undertake a reading tour, and it was for this that he and Rees pored afresh over his beloved Shakespeare, searching for new and finer readings. Together they prepared the versions of the plays he was to use.

At the Academy of Music, on October 15, 1872,  
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Edwin Forrest faced an exacting audience, *in propria persona*, until he came to intone the lines of Shakespeare, when he sank into his old ways as an interpreter. Here was a *Hamlet* at the desk, to use the words of Rees, but the fires were cold, and the devotees of the Forrest manner had gone. All but he departed. There are no graphic pictures of him in his new rôle of reader.

In 1867, Dickens had paid his second visit to America. I can find no reference to it among the Forrest papers. Nor was there any refanning of the smoldering flames of the Astor Place Riot. It may be that Forrest's friends at that time emphasized to him the profitableness of a reading tour. It may be that he himself dreamed that the reception accorded the British novelist would be even greater for himself. For he knew that he was a great reader. During this time, however, there was no one who could paint indelible pictures of Forrest in words, embody his portraiture in narrative, as they did Dickens when he came to America. I have looked everywhere to find such rich description of Forrest as that colorful memory of Trowbridge, who went to hear Dickens read: the detail is etched delicately and unfailingly on the mind:

I distinctly recall a brisk little man most exquisitely attired, with a button-hole rose, glittering studs and rings; a heavy fob-chain festooning his low-cut waistcoat; a bald crown, and a portentous port-wine complexion, which a maroon-colored screen, always in place behind him on the platform, and a maroon-colored desk in front,

were artfully designed to relieve; a theatrical manner, a worn-out actor's voice, and many false intonations (the rising inflection being much too insistent), but with marvellously mobile features, an animation of style and a contagious sense of his own fun which would have redeemed worse faults.

There is no such flash of the living Forrest as one gets in Edmund Yates' impression of Henry Wikoff, “A tall, gentlemanly-looking man, with a ‘swivel’ eye, rough-hewn features, a carefully arranged *toupet*-wig, a couple of inches of dyed whisker, frock-coated, high-cravated, and always well shod.”

All we have of Edwin Forrest, off guard, so to speak, are faded daguerreotypes of a worn man sitting at his desk, with mementoes of an old-fashioned library around him, a bulky figure amidst statuary and armor and heavy oils upon the walls around. Whenever the literary folk mentioned him, it was usually in the spirit of cartoon.

There are evidences during Forrest's reading tour of reception committees with white and gold badges to give excitement to the scene, but neither in New York, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Wilmington, Delaware, or Boston, was there any sign of warm support. On December 7, 1872, after his reading of *Othello*, the curtain was rung down on the active career of Edwin Forrest. The Tremont Temple, in Boston, was witness to his long farewell.

He hastened to his Philadelphia Broad Street home, ill and weary. And he shut himself up in his library. He wrote his last letter to Oakes; he fingered the

leaves of his beloved folio Shakespeare; he gazed upon himself as *Coriolanus*, thankful that he had persuaded the committee of gentlemen who had ordered the statue cut to allow him to buy it from them for his house. And then, on December 12, 1872, Edwin Forrest was found dead in his room, alone.

They all did him honor in the usual way; delegations traveled to his home for the funeral. His dear friends, Oakes and Lawson, and Forney and Dougherty, gathered around this lonely man, their friend: they went with him to St. Paul's Church; and there in the Philadelphia churchyard they left him still more alone.

And these same friends were designated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to turn his Springbrook property into a realization of his long-treasured dream, the Edwin Forrest Home. Unswerving to the very last in the securing of his intention, Forrest saw to it that his will was obeyed.

There were Forrest Clubs and Forrest Lodges organized in his memory; but, if Forrest's name stands to-day, it is largely because he was a remarkable man in his own right; the unfortunate thing is that his genius was alloy, not made pure in the divine heat of profound creativeness. What he did, he performed with all the resources of his nature. He was constantly conscious of the seriousness of his calling. When a man of this dominance passes, there is a reverberation which echoes through the pages of history, just as the colors of that dominance are a part of the richness of all that goes before.

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Whatever Forrest touched he intensified, left vivid in recollection.

Those men who bore him to his grave knew him in a light not given many to see. They mourned him, not as a professional loss, but in closer communion. Forrest the lonely man had conquered even his loneliness in them. That devotion of a personal nature which went with the passing of his family, with the death of his children, with the shattering of his married life, was found again in them. Satisfaction he got in the plaudit of audiences. But what is a man worth if there be not some one to say, as James Taylor wrote of Forrest: “All we have left to us . . . is to meet and talk over the pleasure we once enjoyed in the company of our friend.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ONE HUNDRED PER CENT. EDWIN FORREST

The name of Edwin Forrest means very little to the present generation of theatregoers. Yet, in selecting him for the subject of a biography, we have been fair to a generation that has gone in estimating him as the *beau ideal* of the theatre of their day. There are even a few left who still worship at his shrine of art, and mark him yet as the greatest star America has to this time produced. He was the *Ultima Thule* of eloquence, not only among players but among orators ; he was the personification of earthly grace. Aeolis had not greater control over the strings of harmony than he. It was sacrilege to speak ill of the dramatic art of Edwin Forrest ; it was brave to shift loyalty from him to his namesake, Edwin Booth, who faded his laurels and proclaimed instead a new school.

Pomp and circumstance are liable to overvalue values. And, if I have laid myself open to the criticism that I have striven to explode the Forrest Bubble, I have been led into doing so by no effort on my part, but rather by the cruelty of devastating facts, as they have opened up to me, step by step. There are some features that become deeply marked at an early age. Such were the lineaments of Edwin

Forrest. There are some physiques that, having attained certain definiteness of outline, remain fixed. Such was the stalwart, flat-footed attitude of Edwin Forrest. To see him was to be impressed by elements of vigor and romance which seized one with wonder and admiration. The mere diapason character of his voice — modulated back and forth between fiery passion and tenderness — became, to the generation that revered him, a standard by which all acting must be judged.

The actor, James E. Murdoch, records that his "peculiar intonations are duplicated all over the country — not only on the stage, but also in many individuals in private life, who have sacrificed their own vocal individuality to adopt the deep chest-tones of America's first distinguished tragedian."

There was a fascination also attached to the mere fact that Forrest was a fighter — the man who had caused a riot, who had horsewhipped Willis, who had sued a newspaper for defamation of artistic character, who had for eighteen years fought the decisions of superior courts regarding his divorce. Forrest posed as an injured man: and the warped hero, who still holds to the fighting spirit, always wins the sympathies of the crowds.

But, fundamentally, to the loyal hosts of his generation, Forrest was feared, and fear always provokes fascination; he was a bully, and crowds always love a whip lash in the hands of a ringmaster. He could turn and twist poetic lines to suit his temper, and whole houses would roar in recognition of his full-

blooded hate. When, during the evil week of the Astor Riots, Forrest turned the lines of Macbeth upon his enemies, no matador was more elated over the red scarf in his hand. The actor disappeared before the hater. He rolled all irritating thoughts about in his turbulent, untutored mind, and whipped himself into mad frenzy; his own reality and his own ability to assume passion reinforced each other. Not even in his virile maturity, or in his mellowing years was he ever able to exercise restraint: and what he could not do at moments affecting his life, he could neither do in creating the characters of his imagination. He was impulsive in warmth of heart; he was also torrential in his bitter rage — an ungovernable man in all respects, as regards his personal behavior and his artistic method.

He nurtured a religion of hatred; preached it daily. He never forgave his enemies, though it is often represented that he inquired in later years after the welfare of Macready. When Jamieson met an accidental death, he wrote from Syracuse, on October 5, 1868, "God is great; and justice, though slow, is sure. Another scoundrel has gone to hell — I trust forever." In a letter of earlier date, December 17, 1858, he wrote from Baltimore: "I never believed in the Christian hypocrisy which tells us to love our enemies. My religion is to love the good and to eschew the evil, therefore I eschew Mr. Gilbert [the actor, John Gilbert]. Physical cowardice may be forgiven, but I never forgave a moral coward, and therefore I forgive not Mr. Gilbert."

Again, to Alger, on August 28, 1870, he writes: "Yes, let me own that I have a religion of Hate—not Revenge—I have a hatred of oppression in whatever form it may appear—a hatred of hypocrisy, falsehood, and injustice—a hatred of bad and wicked men and women, and a hatred of my enemies, for whom I have no forgiveness excepting through their own repentance of the injuries they have done me."

Those who played with Forrest always found fearful excitement, not knowing when the live wire of his "mastodonian muscularity", as Charles T. Congdon called it, would numb the spiritual values of the play or bring physical hurt to those on the stage. There were many, like Congdon, who recognized in Forrest nothing of the fine art, but merely "gladiatorial exhibitions." When Congdon first saw Ellen Tree and then witnessed a Forrest performance, he felt as though he were "passing from the musical meadows of Arcadia to the fields of Bashan, resonant with bovine bellowers." Here was an actor born for single combat, proud of the calves of his legs, unwilling to hide any hirsute fashions of his face to make less Forrestian the character he was impersonating. This did not matter when it came to melodramatic rôles; it might displease the fastidious playgoer, who looked for something beneath the outward show, but it was forgotten in those pieces which Congdon declared seemed "specially written for his private legs and larynx."

That latter organ was Forrest's pride. We are

told he was once informed that Gustavus Brooke, the actor, could equal him in volume and tone of voice, it being generally accepted that when Forrest spoke his "few lengths of stately declamation", all other voices dimmed beside his. John Foster Kirk wrote that "it would have seemed ridiculous that he should be cast for any parts except the greatest: the other actors, even those who were taller, looked insignificant beside him, and their voices, when strongest, seemed thin, and, if I may so apply the word, juiceless, in the comparison." And this recorder is authority for the belief that Forrest's poses were only suited to melodrama in its coarsest forms. He remembered Forrest's *Spartacus*, "the legs curved bandywise with the bent knees wide apart, the left arm akimbo and the head leaning to that side, the sword in the right hand held horizontally, with upturned edge, above the head." He saw in the voice only affected guttural sounds; he recognized in his reading of lines pauses that were affected rather than eloquent. In finality, "not only did he not seem to lose his own individuality, but he did not seem to find it in that of any personage that he represented." Nevertheless there was a natural charm at times in Forrest, especially in speeches touched by poetry and sentiment, which won him unstinted applause.

Brooke was in one of the English companies that supported Forrest on one of his English tours; he was warned of the American actor's dominant vocal power. "We 'll see," said Brooke, ready dressed to

play *Iago* to Forrest's *Othello*. The third act came, and the two crossed tonal swords. Forrest let forth the full volume of his utterance; Brooke replied with a counter volley; Forrest showed his astonishment; he had met his match. It rankled sorely.

But whatever the opinions of Edwin Forrest as an artist, it was generally recognized, and truly stated by Artemus Ward (writing in *Vanity Fair* for December 15, 1860), that "Ed draws like a six-ox team."

The *Easy Chair*, writing in *Harper's Magazine* for December, 1863, expressed surprise that he had recently met a man who had never seen Forrest. "If he had said that he had never seen Trinity Church, or the Astor House, or the Hospital," gasped the occupant of the *Chair*, "it would have been strange; but to aver that he had never seen Forrest was to tax credibility." So they went to Niblo's. "All the seats were full, and the aisles, and the steps. And the people sat upon the stairs that ascend to the second tier, and they hung upon the balustrade, and they peeped over shoulders and between heads, and everything wore the aspect of a first night, of a *début*. And yet it was the thirty- or forty-somethingth night of the engagement." The *Easy Chair* saw in all this a deep-founded delight in Forrest as an actor, no matter how much his guttural "ah-h-h-h" might be burlesqued, notwithstanding how often his "bicep aesthetics" might be cartooned (as they were, for instance, in John Brougham's burlesque of *Metamora*). *Harper's* continues in its analysis:

To criticise it as acting is as useless as to criticise the stories of Miss Braddon or of Mr. Ainsworth as literature. That human beings, under any conceivable circumstances, should ever talk or act as they are represented in the Forrest drama and the Braddon novel, is beyond belief. The sum of criticism upon it seems to be that the acting is a boundless exaggeration of all the traditional conventions of the stage. After ten minutes' looking and listening, the rustic friend turned and said, "Why, I seem to have seen him a hundred times." It was true to the impression; for there is nothing new. You have seen and heard exactly the same thing a hundred times, with more or less excellence. I say excellence, because it is certainly very complete in its way. The life of "the stage" was never more adequately depicted. It is the sock-and-buskin view of nature and emotion. And it has a palpable physical effect. There were a great many young women around us crying in the tender passages between *Damon* and his wife. They were not refined nor intellectual women. They were, perhaps, rather coarse. But they cried good, hearty tears.

Nevertheless, *The Easy Chair's* friend got his fill of Forrest after one act. So the two meandered to the Winter Garden to see Edwin Booth as *Iago*. The atmosphere was markedly refined by contrast. The acting was paler, thinner, more delicate, more subtle, yet amidst the audience was a chilliness; they were not irresistibly carried away by the physical force of the interpretation. It was easy to determine why Forrest held such a sway. Tomasso Salvini never saw him act, but from hearsay declared him to be the Modena of America. There were certain

qualities in Salvini which made him well suited to what were known as the "Forrest rôles" — *The Gladiator, King Lear, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Coriolanus*. In fact, what Salvini said of the latter part, might have been similarly asserted by Forrest. "I felt that I could divine that character, which resembled my own in some ways . . . in his susceptibility, in his spurning of the arrogance and insolent pretensions of the ignorant masses, and, above all, in his filial submissiveness and affection."

The belief that one was preordained to fill exactly the requirements of a part, not only by quality and sympathy, but by experience, was also typical of Forrest. One evening, after a performance of *Lear*, he was confronted by a youthful admirer, who trembled forth the empty compliment that his acting of the part of *Lear* was fine. Forrest strode up to the lad, caught him by the collar, and shook him violently in emphasis as he said, "I may enact *Spartacus, Jack Cade, Metamora*, but, by God, sir, I am King Lear!"

When John Hay was abroad, in 1867, his thoughts were constantly centred on Forrest, indicating how completely that actor was regarded as *the* standard of acting. In the House of Lords, Earl Powis flashed upon him as "a smaller Forrest"; in Vienna, witnessing "King Lear" at the Burg Theatre, "I remembered Forrest's storms and tempests of passion — often overdone, sometimes in bad taste, but always full of wonderful spirit and inexhaustible physical energy; and the careful and somewhat

lachrymose style of Wagner suffered very much by comparison." Hay went to Spain, and Castelas, advocate of republicanism, spoke "with precisely the energy and fluency that Forrest exhibits in the most rapid passages of his most muscular plays" — the violent action of Forrest, the florid style of Gibbon! It was this predominant robustiousness, said J. T. Trowbridge, which often dimmed Forrest's "really great qualities (conspicuous in *King Lear*), and his admirable elocution (noticeable even in a part so wholly unsuited to him as *Hamlet*). . . ." An anecdote is preserved by Murdoch, bearing upon Forrest's playing *Metamora*, in Augusta, Georgia, during 1831. A local judge witnessed the performance, and was heard to exclaim: "Any actor who could utter such scathing language, and with such vehemence, must have the whole matter at heart. Why, his eyes shot fire and his breath was hot with the hissing of his ferocious declamation. I insist upon it, Forrest believes in that d——d Indian speech, and it is an insult to the whole community."

In justice to Forrest, let it here be stated that he was never an ardent advocate of *Metamora*, even though it proved to be one of his most profitable rôles. The only indirect suggestion as to this which I can find is a paragraph in a letter to his friend, Daniel Dougherty, under date of November 10, 1867, wherein he says, "I am to send tickets to Miss Gillespie for herself and your children to witness the play of 'Metamora' on Wednesday next. Of course, the *Indian Chief* will be an object of wonder

to the eye of childhood. I wish none but children would ever come to see me in it."

Like David Belasco, Forrest went to extremes in the study of emotion. The author of "The Girl of the Golden West" has often declared that he never knew the heart of woman until he had held in his hand a warm human heart which had just stopped beating. Alger tells of Forrest's allowing a boa constrictor to crawl over his neck so he might measure the feeling. And it is known that while preparing himself for the rôle of *Lear* he made a careful study of insanity, even visiting an asylum for that purpose.

Enough has been said of Forrest's personal character to ignore it further in summary here, except in so far as it is inevitable that the artist should be affected by his physical and psychological capacity for good or evil. Just the outward equipment of the man alone would predetermine certain qualities of his style of acting. William Winter could not at times separate the personal limitations from the technical excellence, though, in his review of Forrest's career on the 102d anniversary of his birth (*New York Tribune*, March 8, 1908), his portraiture of the actor is vivid and in just proportions. He wrote:

No actor of the nineteenth century has been the theme of such acrimonious controversy as Edwin Forrest occasioned; the reason being that absolute harmony can never exist between the antagonistic systems of muscle and mind. Forrest was an uncommonly massive and puissant

animal, and all of his impersonations were more physical than intellectual, while no one of them possessed any considerable spiritual element. In the latter part of his life, when he had passed through fiery trials of affliction and been ravaged with grief, he gave a profoundly affecting performance of *King Lear*; but in his prime of achievement his acting was mainly characterized by excessive muscular vigor. He had a magnificent voice, powerful, rich, copious, various, resonant; a face of leonine strength and lowering menace; dark, piercing eyes, and a person of rugged build; and in theatrical situations of peril, suspense, or conflict, requiring the opposition of granite solidity, physical power, and vehement, tumultuous, overwhelming vociferation, he was tremendously effective.

An actor of such power could easily fall into absurd excesses, especially where physical realism took the place of spiritual insight. Winter recalls how Forrest would loll out his tongue in terror, contort the muscles of his face, pant, snort, snarl, gasp, and gurgle in the agonies of death. Winter's comments are like shorthand notes at a performance, as he proceeds:

The bellow that he emitted, when, as *Richelieu*, he threatened to launch the ecclesiastical curse, almost made the theatre walls tremble. The snarling yell of ferocity that burst from him, when, as *Jack Cade*, he recognized and sprang upon *Lord Say*, in the forest, fairly frightened his hearers. His utterance of *Lear*'s delirious prayer to Nature was like a thunderstorm. Often he produced amazingly consolatory effects — affording ample gratification to the overstrained feelings of his audience, de-

#### EDWIN FORREST

sirous, as in the stormy passages of "King Lear" and "Othello", the forum scene of "Virginius", the statue scene of "Brutus", and the scaffold scene of "Damon and Pythias", that something tempestuous and terrific should be said and done.

We have attempted to show that Forrest was a phenomenon, characteristic of the young America of his generation, just as Barnum was a phenomenon of Yankee astuteness by which America was estimated abroad. Yet the moroseness of the man, his austerity, his weighty self-consciousness, his complete immersion in the event at hand, even though on the wrong course—none of these virtues or vices served to excuse him to the exacting world. Barnum might commit the most egregious sins against bad taste; he might put over on the most gullible public any degree of fake proposition, and his enthusiasm would carry with it the sources of forgiveness. Thackeray sought him out while he was visiting America; Matthew Arnold spent a night with him at Bridgeport, Connecticut; Queen Victoria joined the astounded Londoners in their surprise at the brazen proposals of the American star. Forrest was just as individual; but the only thing he had to show was his personality, his own animalism. He was no humbug. He gave freely, lavishly, with no abatement of endeavor, all that was in him. He imposed upon himself the task of convincing every one that he had fallen heir to Edmund Kean's laurels. To him this was indisputable. But to others it was far from true.

"What a mountain of a man," exclaimed Fanny

Kemble, when she first met him. He had called upon her to pay his devoirs on September 20, 1832. She probably saw him during the last period of his gallant youth, before he assumed the Roman toga, the forum stride. There was nothing for him in the school of Charles Kemble. Would, indeed, that he had possessed what Leigh Hunt said were the attractive qualities of Kemble's work: gallant ease, gentlemanly mirth, delicate raillery, gay, glittering enterprise. There might be in Kemble a sympathetic Roman attitude. When Forrest spoke, even as a young man, Miss Kemble must have felt all the more her father's weakness of voice, his want of intensity and vigor. But the qualities she admired most in acting were those which Forrest did not possess and was never to have — refined taste, a sense of harmonious proportion, a native delicacy of sentiment. In some respects he was as heavy as his own marble statue of *Coriolanus*, though many have asserted that he had his lightsome moods. But he was never comfortable in social grace.

His emotions were near the surface. Prick him with kindness, and his heart welled over with unrestrained generosity; cause him to be suspicious, and, with none of the cunning of an *Iago* but with all the grossness of a wild animal, he would tear at the issue with blind fury. He was always on the defensive; hence his attitudes were generally offensive. Lover as he was of the art of acting, founder as he was of the idea of caring for the American actor in his old age, yet every deed he perpetrated served



*From the Albert Davis Collection*

**FORREST AS KING LEAR**

"Forrest, toward the end of his career, illuminated [the play] in such a manner as to enthrall and satisfy the imagination and deeply affect the feelings. The desolation of a strong mind blasted by misery and enfeebled by physical decay, and an affectionate heart broken by injustice and submerged by grief, looked out at his eyes and spoke in his voice."

— WILLIAM WINTER



to bring his profession into the unhealthy limelight. Devastating experience turned him into a misanthrope. This Mastodon of the Drama, this Bowery B'hoy's Delight, this Ferocious Tragedian, who was fundamentally an emotional Melodramatist, was, when all is said and done, one of the most pathetic figures in the history of the American Theatre. The pathos lay in the misguidance of himself. There was a primitive picturesqueness to his work, a certain natural grace which was long drawn out as he grew older.

We may read Rees and Alger in estimate of Forrest's particular rôles, and get some of the flavor of his acting, but I have found nowhere a better summary of him than that which was published after his death in 1872, in a Philadelphia *Dispatch* notice (December 15) of his career. In 1868, Forrest had sued that paper for defamation of character, and, not appreciating their burlesque of certain flagrant characteristics of his, he had assumed that their strictures against his work were hurtful. The paper openly apologized for what might be interpreted as libellous. All the more remarkable, therefore, is this description of his abilities which, based on actual observation, has the value of authenticity about it.

Of the quality of Mr. Forrest's acting strongly conflicting opinions have been formed, which of late years have given place to a more moderate and accurate estimate. We have referred to Mr. Stuart's criticism [in the *New York Tribune*], which was terribly mistaken, inas-

much as it did not recognize the intellectual ability of Mr. Forrest. Judged by those descriptions, he would appear to be a monster of physical strength, and nothing more. So the *Tribune*, in its obituary notice, refers to him as a "vast animal bewildered by a little grain of genius." Praise equally unjust as the censure was lavished upon him by other critics; and thus his character resembled that famous shield which, sable on one side and silver on the other, caused the two knights to fight because they could not agree upon its color. We think that, notwithstanding the incorrect opinions the *Dispatch* may have advanced, it may claim to have first promulgated and to have consistently sustained that general estimate of Mr. Forrest's acting which the sober judgment of the public has accepted. Though it was looked upon as Mr. Forrest's opponent, it was the first journal to refute the charge that he was a merely muscular tragedian, a body without brains, and to assign intellect as the principal cause of his great success. This was the service it rendered him, and an important one at that time, when passion painted him either as god or beast. But intellect alone does not make the complete man. Mr. Forrest had a strong analytic brain, and habits of study which enabled him to grasp the meaning of a passage in Shakspere more firmly than any actor we have ever heard. So far as interpretation of the sense was concerned, he was the greatest reader on the stage. He disclosed an idea with exactness, energy and fullness, and in this respect left nothing to be desired. His reading was like a mathematical demonstration. His recitation of *Othello*'s address to the Senate was a masterpiece of elocution. We despair of ever hearing such majestic delivery again. But, with unusual powers of comparison and

analysis, he was deficient in imagination — a faculty essential to the actor of Shakspere. Imagination is like love, and

“With the motion of all elements  
Courses as swift as thought in every power,  
And gives to every power a double power,  
Above their functions and their offices.”

“It adds a precious seeing to the eye”, and, wanting it, Mr. Forrest was blind to much that was clear to men who were his inferiors as strong reasoners. Hence he failed completely in some of the tragedies, because he could not by any force of logic enable himself to *feel* the character he assumed. This was the case with *Hamlet*, which he read with wonderful accuracy, but touched with a heavy hand. His physical appearance made any illusion impossible; but such defects are more easily overlooked than is the want of appreciation. In *Othello* he never reconciled the two great inspiring passions of the character, jealousy and love, but kept them apart, and made the love secondary; whereas it is the controlling influence of the play. His fifth act of “Othello” was an utter failure, a barren commonplace, up to the entrance of *Emilia* after the murder. Being unable to express the proper emotion, Mr. Forrest simulated an unnatural calmness. He tried to show restrained passion, but only succeeded in exhibiting the restraint. Mr. William W. Story, in his “Roba di Roma”, describes the acting of an Italian actor, Salvini, in this scene: “In the last interview with *Desdemona*,” he says, “Salvini is wonderful. Like a tiger weaving across his cage, he ranges to and fro along the furthest limits of the stage, now stealing away from her with long strides and avoiding her approaches, and now turning fiercely round upon her and rolling his

black eyes, by turns agitated by irresolution, touched by tenderness, or goading himself into rage, until, at last, like a storm, he seizes her and bears her away to her death. . . . After the deed has been accomplished, what can exceed the horror of his ghastly face as he looks out between the curtains he gathers about him when he hears *Emilia's* knock — or the anguish and remorse of that wild, terrible cry as he leans over her dead body after he knows her innocence — or the savage rage of that sudden scream with which he leaps upon *Iago?*" Of anything approaching to such emotion Mr. Forrest was incapable in *Othello*; but when the *Moor* resumes his self-control, having resolved upon death, then Mr. Forrest was manly and impressive. The passage, "Behold, I have a weapon", was grandly delivered, and the closing speech exquisitely gentle. But the *Othello* of the third and fourth acts was not the *Othello* of Shakspere. His *Macbeth* was a still greater failure, and was worthy of remembrance only for isolated passages of beautiful reading. It is the most imaginative of all tragedies, and one of the four or five of which each always seems the greatest at the moment you are reading. Because it is Shakespeare's most imaginative tragedy, the performance of *Macbeth* was Mr. Forrest's worst. The witches he could not see, the ghost of *Banquo* did not appal him, the horror of *Macbeth's* remorse he could not depict. In other characters Mr. Forrest was far more successful. Had "Coriolanus" been a popular tragedy, he would have made the Roman one of his noblest personations; but, though he played it well, it did not attract the public. Of all his Shakespearean personations, his *Lear* was the finest, and one long to be remembered with delight. In the modern plays, such as "The Gladiator", "Virginius",

“Damon and Pythias”, and “Richelieu”, Mr. Forrest gave more consistent and less faulty performances, because they are less difficult than Shakspere; but his greatest scenes were in the Shakespearean tragedies, because they afford the grandest opportunities. Pathos he expressed touchingly in many cases, especially when his own bitter experiences had taught him to understand the special phase of grief. He had little mobility of feature, and not much variety of action. He was greatest as a reader, and through his voice his mind achieved its victories upon the stage. His were solemnly musical tones, that came “from the deep throat of sad Mel-pomene”, as in the “farewell” of *Othello* and last words of *Virginius* to his child. The fault of his reading was its mannerism; he developed its virtues sometimes to an excess, and used his voice too much as if it were a musical instrument. His emphasis was occasionally too elaborate, and the way he uttered *Hamlet*’s first words, “A little more than kin and less than kind,” showed at the very beginning his misconception of the character.

If Forrest fought against the weaknesses of his character, there were other qualities about him that can well explain the hero worship which was lavished upon him. He was in many respects a sterling actor; and as a man there were many manly qualities which would attract certain types of people to him, winning their loyalty through any amount of strain put upon it. Forrest’s interest in any charitable enterprise which had a worthy appeal was easily captured; and usually it won from him unstinted support, either by the use of his name or by the offer of his services or by the actual contribution of money;

he showed that this interest was not a mere expression of words, but rather took a practical form and left the charity the richer. As first president of the American Dramatic Fund, he was anxious to give for it a yearly benefit. But the actor of that day had to be careful not to fall into the error of being duped by false charities which turned to the theatre as the easiest and quickest way of getting money from the public. Both Forrest and Charlotte Cushman expressed themselves very emphatically on that score, and brought down upon them much newspaper criticism for their stand against benefits as the channels of least resistance. Forrest gave money generously to the needy, and the ungratefulness he received in return for these sincere courtesies increased his bitterness toward the end of his life. There must have been a warm lovable ness about him when he was won over unreservedly. His friends who, toward the end of his life, rallied to him and strove to brighten his darkened days, called forth the best that was in him.

As an artist, there was something which justified the hero worship which exalted him. There were strength and power and picturesque boldness which lifted passion to a thunderous height. Not without some reason were *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Coriolanus* accounted his greatest Shakespearean rôles; he studied these parts for their elocutionary fullness, for the style of acting was largely elocutionary, and an actor was big in so far as the volume of his reading was thunderous. It was this volume which was memo-

rable in the expression of the fiercer passions of Forrest's rôles. What did Mr. Hackett say of his *Othello*?

I rank it as a whole, and excepting the late Edmund Kean's, the best I have ever seen in either hemisphere. . . . Mr. Forrest inspires more terror than pity; though I remember on one occasion particularly, at the Park Theatre, noticing to a friend that "Mr. Forrest had infused into his *last* act of *Othello* a degree of manly tenderness, refined sensibility, and touching melancholy, so true to Nature and Art, that his performance therein afforded me exquisite and unalloyed gratification."

The Forrest piercing black eyes under what Hackett called "his inflexible brows", which made his countenance severe and unyielding, look at us now, through the space of time, with a sharp, individualistic distinctness. I doubt whether a jury would award him unanimously a niche in a Hall of Fame, even though his name adds lustre to our dramatic past. The Forrest Home has enshrined him as the instigator of a great institution. There rest all his tragic unfulfillments; there rest the remnants of his culture; there are revered the virile delineations which he gave according to an age that is no more. When that age does occasionally suggest itself to us in the acting of others, it shows how far away it is from the satisfaction of our present needs and tastes. The Age of Forrest has passed. But as an historical figure, Edwin Forrest represents more than an actor playing to those who gave him adoration and support. He was built and molded

## THE FABULOUS FORREST

out of the social ideals of his time. A review of his sixty-six tempestuous years, to be complete, means a review of sixty-six years in a nation's life. I believe that one of the greatest claims — and no other actor can exact this claim in the history of the American Theatre — that Forrest can make on our respectful attention at the present time is that he so completely helps us to reach a vivid impression of the nation's vigorous fulfillments and its youthful inadequacies.

FINIS

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The student is advised to consult the files of the cumulative indices, as well as back numbers of the *Theatre Magazine*. Such records as are to be found in the *Spirit of the Times*, the *Home Journal*, and other contemporary papers, are indispensable. References of a detailed character, relating to the American Theatre, are easily available in other standard works. I have here noted only those books which have direct bearing on the life of Forrest.

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